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1. Sermons



Tessie Douglass

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Henson







# The Value of the Bible

## and other Sermons

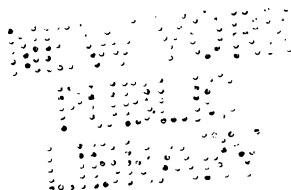
(1902-1904)

With a Letter to  
The Lord Bishop of London

BY

H. HENSLEY HENSON, B.D.

CANON OF WESTMINSTER AND RECTOR OF ST. MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER  
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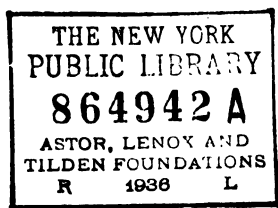
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TO

## The Lord Bishop of London

MY LORD BISHOP,—

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You already know the reason why these discourses are now published. They form the only answer I can consent to make to the numerous attacks, public and private, to which my teaching and my character have been for some months exposed. It had not been my intention to add any preface, but I feel that it would indicate a measure of disrespect for the Bishop, within whose jurisdiction one of the great churches which I serve is situate, if I made no reference to your Lordship's recent sermon in Ely Cathedral.

It is of course scarcely possible for me to discuss the public utterances of one who is not only superior in hierarchical office, but also bound to me by the ties of close and long-standing friendship. Apart from other considerations, the regard and affection which I entertain towards you render even the appearance of public conflict between us extremely odious ; and, accordingly, I shall take leave to confine myself to a simple re-statement of the positions, so summarily disallowed by your Lordship, and yet, as I



needs must maintain, so just in themselves, and so indispensable at the present time. If even to do this may seem to argue an undue indifference to ecclesiastical etiquette, I can but plead two considerations. On the one hand—as your Lordship, in selecting Ely Cathedral for the scene of your discourse, must be supposed to recognise—I hold an exceptional position among the clergy of London. As Canon of Westminster I am extra-diocesan, and as Rector of St. Margaret's I neither receive institution from the Bishop of London, nor take with respect to him any oath of canonical obedience. On the other hand, the interests at stake are of such importance that their faithful wardship transcends the trivialities of hierarchical convention. Both your Lordship and I are subject to the Law ; and neither of us has the right to alter the legal limits of theological liberty, whether by restriction or by enlargement. I do not understand your Lordship to dispute the legal validity of the claim which, not for the first time, I have advanced. Assuredly no doubt on the subject has ever visited my own mind. Obedience to the Law is with me almost a religion ; and I would never wittingly demand for myself, or for others, the right to break the Law. It is because, as I believe, the Law secures to the English clergyman a sufficient liberty in the matters of faith and teaching, that I am able to hold office in the National Church, and to give my life loyally to the work of the Christian Ministry.

What, then, are the positions which have been maintained in what I suppose must be called my



*incriminated* Articles and Sermons? Perhaps they may be sufficiently stated under five heads.

1. I have maintained that the Creeds have no independent authority apart from the Scripture. This would seem the plain teaching of Article VIII., and it is thus stated by the Bishop of Worcester in his well-known *Bampton Lectures* :—

“ In the view of ancient and Anglican orthodoxy, the creeds are simply summaries of the original Christian faith as it is represented in Scripture. They are summaries such as are necessary for the purposes of a teaching church, to serve as introductions to the study of Scripture and guides to its scattered, but consistent, statements and implications : summaries which always refer us back to Scripture for their justification or proof, it being the function of ‘the church to teach,’ as the phrase goes, ‘the Bible to prove.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

Some of the expressions here employed by Bishop Gore are not free from ambiguity, but substantially I think it will be allowed that his statement accords with the teaching of the Article in the *Hibbert Journal*, where I write thus : “ It must be laid down as an axiom of discussion that the Creed can add nothing to the weight of the testimonies contained in the New Testament, which are not only prior in point of time, but also are admittedly the basis upon which the affirmations of the Creed ultimately rest.”<sup>2</sup> It accords also with the teaching in the sermon entitled “ St. Luke’s Prologue—The Charter of

<sup>1</sup> P. 81.

<sup>2</sup> P. 484.



Criticism," published in this volume. There I maintain that "the Gospels stand towards the Creeds as the volumes of evidence towards a Report. The one is valuable and authoritative, precisely in so far as it is a faithful summary and interpretation of the other. The Creeds have no independent authority ; they add nothing to our knowledge about the Lord ; they help us only by officially stating what the New Testament contains ; but the spiritual worth of the statement depends wholly on its fidelity to the documents."<sup>1</sup>

2. I have maintained that the New Testament, equally with the Old, must be subjected frankly to the normal methods of criticism and interpretation. In the article on "The Future of the Bible," in the *Contemporary Review*, I said frankly : "For obvious reasons the Old Testament has been first surrendered to the critics, but it must be evident to every thoughtful and unprejudiced man that the attempt to arrest the advance of criticism precisely where the line falls between the Jewish and Christian Scriptures cannot possibly succeed." I do not suppose that this proposition will be seriously contested by any one who admits the legitimacy of applying historical criticism to the Old Testament ; but it is certainly the case that many religious people, who acquiesce without difficulty in a frank critical treatment of the older Scriptures, manifest considerable resentment when the process is carried on to the later. Yet it may fairly be argued that if any exemption could be pleaded for either Testament, it would be

<sup>1</sup> *Infra*, p. 70.



the Old rather than the New which could best justify the plea. For the Old Testament is received by the Church on the supreme authority of Christ Himself; every reference to the Scriptures in the writings of the Apostles and their immediate successors applies solely to the Old Testament. Even those who, with the present writer, dissent from the view therein so solemnly expressed, can feel the weight of such language as this which I borrow from the great Charge in which that learned prelate, the late Bishop of Oxford, condemned the views with respect to the Incarnation which had recently been set forth by one of his clergy, the present Bishop of Worcester.

“With this belief” (viz. that Christ’s Omniscience is of the essence of the personality in which manhood and Godhead united in Him), said Dr. Stubbs, “I feel that I am bound to accept the language of our Lord in reference to the Old Testament Scriptures as beyond appeal. Where He says that Moses and the Prophets wrote or spoke of Him, and the report of His saying this depends on the authority of His Evangelist, I accept His warrant for understanding that Moses and the Prophets did write and speak about Him, in the sense in which I believe that He means it. Where He speaks of David in spirit calling Him Lord, I believe that David in spirit did call Him Lord, and I am not affected by doubts thrown on the authorship of the 110th Psalm, except so far as to use His authority to set those doubts aside.”<sup>1</sup> It is

<sup>1</sup> *Visitation Charges*, p. 151.



impossible not to venerate the devotion to the Divine Lord which inspires such language ; and without question, if learning and character could ever authenticate opinions to men's acceptance, the opinions expressed by Bishop Stubbs possessed such authentications ; and yet, where are the scholars who would endorse those opinions to-day ? Where are the Universities in which the Professors would accept Bishop Stubbs's doctrine as to the limits imposed by the New Testament on the criticism of the Old ? In the case of the New Testament this solemn and difficult issue of the authority of Christ's usage and that of the usage of the Apostles does not arise. The documents which form the New Testament come to us with the inferior sanctions of ecclesiastical acceptance registered by ecclesiastical decisions. It cannot be reasonable to distinguish between the Testaments, permitting a critical handling of the more authoritative, and prohibiting a critical handling of the less.

If I seem to dwell at excessive length on a point which might be supposed to be the very postulate of the learned labours of our critical scholars, and not less of all the modern exegesis which has any recognised value, it is because on this point depends the whole case which I defend. It will suffice to quote and endorse the language of the author of an excellent and most helpful book which I rejoice to see in a second edition—*The Historical New Testament*, by James Moffatt, B.D. After dwelling on the progress made in criticism of the New Testament, and the prospect of a "practical unanimity"



among competent scholars being reached on many long-debated issues, the author proceeds :—

“The prospects of such a healthy state of matters in New Testament criticism depend, however, upon the straightforward rejection of any *eirenicon* like that which is occasionally offered in this country by some influential writers, who, conceding the rights of criticism within the province of the Old Testament, decline to admit the legitimacy of similar historical research in the New Testament literature, upon the ground either that the latter collection possesses certain qualities of finality and authority which exempt it from being judged by the canons of ordinary treatment, or that it was ‘produced under very different historical conditions.’ This rôle of the theological Canute is due to excellent motives ; but it must be pronounced not merely indefensible but injurious to the best interests of faith and truth. The compromise rests on a misapprehension, and is as unnecessary as it is illegitimate. It has no basis in the facts which come under discussion. The condition of early Christianity in the first and second centuries, it is true, was such as to render the limits within which tradition could be modified considerably less than in the older Semitic literature. In the latter we often deal with centuries where in the former the unit is a decade. Besides, the contexture and vitality of the early Christian communities naturally made testimony upon the whole less ambiguous and remote than in the long spaces of Hebrew development. But the comparative brevity of this period and its internal excel-



lence do not imply that its record must *ipso facto* be strictly historical, nor do they absolutely preclude the activity of such influences as elsewhere modify, develop, and transmute existing traditions under recognised tendencies of human life. As any tyro in New Testament criticism is aware, during the period between 30 and 130 A.D. such influences were particularly keen, owing to the mental atmosphere of the time, and the religious ferment excited by the new faith. Between the quality of the testimony in the Old Testament and that of the New Testament the difference is patent and material; still, it is a difference not of kind but of degree. The principles and standards of historical proof are the same, whatever literature be the subject of inquiry, although the scale of application naturally varies in proportion to the character of the materials. Early Christianity does not indeed require the same elaborateness or methods of literary science as are demanded by the condition in which the Old Testament documents have reached the modern scholar; but unless the character of the first and second centuries A.D. be estimated by historical methods, in as thorough and free a spirit as the age of Samuel or Isaiah, it will continue to remain a province for arbitrary guess-work, and to present the average reader with a series of writings whose sense and connection lie at the mercy of dogmatic or devotional fantasy. Similarly, to hold that the religion enshrined in the New Testament is final in substance and supreme in quality, does not require its adherents to rail off that literature nervously and



sharply as *ex hypothesi* a sacred enclosure, nor have those who do so the right of assuming that this is an essential or permanent position. Unique contents do not imply unique setting, any more than piety of character carries with it physical, moral, or mental perfection. ἔχομεν τὸν θησαυρὸν τοῦτον ἐν ὀστράκείοις σκεύεσιν. The historicity of the tradition embodied in the New Testament literature is far too solid to require privileged treatment or to need exaggerated claims on its behalf. Indeed, its excellence becomes visible and intelligible only as the forms in which it has been preserved are allowed to pass the test imposed by the ordinary canons of historical and literary science when these are fairly applied; any attempt to preclude this analysis as irrelevant or dangerous must be firmly set aside. Such attempts read more or less into the literature: they do not read it for itself."<sup>1</sup>

To this careful statement of the Scotch scholar I would add another from a source which will certainly not lie under any suspicion of unorthodox *arrière pensée*. A scholarly and acute writer in a well-known organ of the High Church party—the *Church Quarterly Review*—concludes a discussion of the historical value of the Synoptic Gospels with some general observations. "We claim," he says, "that the evidence of our documents, when they have been critically sifted, must not be set aside on *a priori* views of what is possible or impossible, because in connection with the person of Christ we are not in a position to say that anything is im-

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 71-73.



possible. But this must not be perverted into a factor for the probability of any historical event. It is one thing to say that a well-attested fact is not impossible in connection with His personality, it is quite another thing to say that because a fact is not impossible in connection with Him, therefore it happened. Whether or not it happened must be decided on historic grounds, and the weight of evidence will not always be uniform.”<sup>1</sup>

3. I have maintained that “with the application of historical criticism to the primitive Christian documents, much that has hitherto passed as fact may very probably be found undeserving of that description”;<sup>2</sup> and in the Easter Day sermon I said that there was much in the primitive accounts of the Resurrection which is demonstrably unhistorical.<sup>3</sup> Opinion will differ as to the extent of non-historical elements in the records of the New Testament, but that such elements do exist to some extent is the assumption of most modern scholars. It would be superfluous to quote the Germans, nor indeed would it be serviceable to do so, since your Lordship has made it very evident that for the scholars of Germany you have no other feelings than those of suspicion, resentment, and dislike; but I may appeal to English scholars of great eminence and undoubted orthodoxy. Dr. Sanday, for example, is regarded universally as one of the soundest and most cautious of our leading critics: his whole attitude is thoroughly conservative, and yet he would certainly not disallow

<sup>1</sup> *Church Quarterly Review*, January 1904, p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> *Hibbert Journal*, p. 484.

<sup>3</sup> *Infra*, p. 208.



my present contention ; nor is it excessive to say that the very pre-supposition of his patient and erudite arguments is the legitimacy of other conclusions than his own being reached by other scholars nowise less honest or less competent than himself. If we are to make an act of faith in the documents before we examine them, our conclusions will undoubtedly be orthodox, but our methods will be doubtful, and our *bona fides* suspected.

"If once we give up the strict verbal accuracy of every detail," said Dr. Sanday in his *Bampton Lectures*, "and do not multiply incidents to an incredible extent merely in order to satisfy every difference of expression in the Gospels, they will themselves reveal to us their true character. There is a rather wide margin in their narratives which is not in perfect harmony. The attempts to harmonize them in a strict sense have notoriously failed. The Gospels are what the attempts to unravel the history of their origin would lead us to expect that they would be, not infallible, but yet broadly speaking, good and true records of those Words which are the highest authority for Christians, and of that Life on which they base their hopes of redemption."<sup>1</sup>

Again, with reference to the Acts, Dr. Sanday expresses himself thus :—

"I wish to take a just, not an optimist view of the Acts of the Apostles. I am willing to see every mistake, that can be proved to be a mistake, corrected,"<sup>2</sup> and he appends a note enumerating "some real difficulties." In an elaborate article in

<sup>1</sup> P. 318.

<sup>2</sup> P. 328.



Dr. Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, Dr. Sanday has indicated sufficiently his acceptance of my present contention. Let any candid man reflect on the suggestions of such language as the following :—

“The narratives of the Temptation are upon the face of them Symbolical.”<sup>1</sup>

“Such instances [*sc.* the no doubt real differences between the story of the healing of the Nobleman's Son in St. John iv. and that of the Centurion's Servant in St. Matt. viii.] mark the limits of a laxer or stricter interpretation of the historicity of the documents, between which we are not in a position to decide with absolute certainty.”<sup>2</sup>

“It should be remembered that these introductory notes as to the circumstances under which discourses were spoken are among the least trustworthy parts of the Gospel tradition, and are often nothing more than vague conjectures of the evangelists.”<sup>3</sup>

“We should be prepared, then, to say that this class of miracles [*sc.* the casting out devils] implied accommodation to the ideas of the time. But when we speak of ‘accommodation’ on the part of our Lord, we do not mean a merely politic assumption of a particular belief for a particular purpose. We mean that the assumption was part of the outfit of His incarnate Manhood. There was a certain circle of ideas which Jesus accepted in becoming Man in the same way in which He accepted a particular language with its grammar and vocabulary.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 612.

<sup>3</sup> P. 621.

<sup>2</sup> P. 613.

<sup>4</sup> P. 624.



"No critical student needs to be told that the evidence for the apparitions of the dead (Matt. xxvii. 52 f.) belongs just to that stratum which carries with it the least weight."<sup>1</sup>

"This fact (*i.e.* the didactic value of the miracles) perhaps leaves some opening for the possibility that here and there what was originally parable may in course of transmission have hardened into miracle. An example of such a possibility would be the withering of the Fig-tree."<sup>2</sup>

In speaking of the Feedings of the Five and Four Thousand, the Walking on the Water, and the Transfiguration, "which sound especially strange to modern ears," Dr. Sanday thinks that "it should be enough to notice that the narratives in question all rest on the very best historical authority," and "belong to the oldest stratum of the evangelical tradition"; but he adds a "warning" which seems to go far to undoing the natural effect of these assurances. "We must repeat the warning, that if a nineteenth-century observer had been present he would have given a different account of the occurrences from that which has come down to us. But the mission of Jesus was to the first century, and not to the nineteenth."<sup>3</sup>

After long and repeated attention to this paragraph I do not see how to use this "warning" without being brought to the conclusion that the *miracles* in question "did not happen," whatever occurrences of a non-miraculous character may underlie the accounts of the Evangelists; but I am

<sup>1</sup> P. 626.

<sup>2</sup> P. 627.

<sup>3</sup> P. 628.



quite sure that is not what Dr. Sanday himself means.

"Matt. xii. 40 (*i.e.* 'for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth') is due only to the evangelist, and is not supported by the other authorities."<sup>1</sup>

On the vexed question of the hour of the Crucifixion we are left "with a conflict of testimony, and the question is, on which side the evidence is strongest."<sup>2</sup>

I shall not refer to Dr. Sanday's discussion of the Resurrection except to notice that he states frankly that "the leading witness is, after all, not the Gospels, but St. Paul,"<sup>3</sup> and, none the less, holds that "the narrative of St. John is no less authoritative than that of St. Paul."<sup>4</sup> With one slight reservation I agree with the result to which he brings his discussion, but I cannot think the discussion itself other than gravely disappointing. "Whichever way we turn difficulties meet us, which the documents to which we have access do not enable us to remove. . . . It is not what we could wish, but what we have. And no difficulty of weaving the separate incidents into an orderly well-compacted narrative can impugn the unanimous belief of the Church which lies behind them, that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day, and appeared to the disciples." It is not the case that "the third day" is beyond critical questioning, though personally I am not prepared to endorse

<sup>1</sup> P. 633.

<sup>2</sup> P. 634.

<sup>3</sup> P. 639.

<sup>4</sup> P. 640.



the negative view with respect to that detail of the tradition.

I have dwelt on the implications of Dr. Sanday's language, because his recent contributions to the literature of New Testament criticism are so widely known and so generally admired; but I might adduce the authority of other names. When Dr. Robertson, now Bishop of Exeter, sweeps away with decision the idea "that the Apostles, at any rate, if not all those present, received at Pentecost the more or less permanent power of preaching in foreign languages," must he not be held to admit that the narrative in Acts ii. includes an unhistorical element? And can he be acquitted of flatly contradicting the "special preface" for Whitsunday? Dr. Robertson is but following in the footsteps of Dean Plumptre, who, in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, had taken the same course of correcting the narrative in the Acts by the evidence of St. Paul. Why will your Lordship deny to me with respect to St. Luke xxiv. the right freely exercised by the Bishop of Exeter with respect to Acts ii., which, indeed, is commonly held to be the work of the same author? It will not be seriously contended that the authority of 1 Cor. xv. is inferior to that of 1 Cor. xiv., nor can it be reverently argued that the Coming of the Holy Ghost was less religiously important than the specific mode of our Saviour's manifestation to His disciples.

4. I have maintained that the well-authenticated results of historical criticism ought to be fairly recognised in Christian teaching. It is here that



my personal concern in the whole subject emerges, for it is here that my conscience as a man, and my procedure as an official teacher of Christianity, are directly touched upon; and here, surely, I may claim that I do not stand alone. "For some time past," writes Dr. Sanday, "there has been a sort of tacit consent, wherever criticism is admitted, to use the Second Epistle of St. Peter with a certain reserve."<sup>1</sup> I extend the application of this principle to all other parts of the Bible which are fairly open to critical suspicion. It seems to me, for example, disingenuous to use the Pastoral Epistles as indisputably Pauline, and to ignore the problems which are well known to exist in connection with the Fourth Gospel. In the case of the New Testament it is within the power of any fairly educated man who will take the requisite pains to form his own opinion on the main questions in debate among the professed critics, and it has seemed to me ever since my Ordination an evident duty to direct my studies and thoughts to this end: in the case of the Old Testament, I confess to a necessity of larger dependence; but, unless the scholars whose works are freely and frequently offered to the reading public are to be credited with an unusual measure of disingenuousness, we may accept with confidence the broad lines of critical agreement. I cannot, therefore, reconcile it to my conscience to ignore in my teaching such declarations as those of Dr. Driver with respect to the Book of Genesis, nor am I in the least disturbed by the fact that his distinguished predecessor in the

<sup>1</sup> *Bampton Lectures*, p. 348.



Oxford Chair of Hebrew would have regarded them with sentiments of religious horror.

"We have found"—such is Dr. Driver's summary of his analysis of the book—"that in the first eleven chapters there is little or nothing that can be called historical in our sense of the word; there may be here and there dim recollections of historical occurrences; but the concurrent testimony of geology and astronomy, anthropology, archæology, and comparative philology, is proof that the account given in these chapters of the creation of heaven and earth, the appearance of living things upon the earth, the origin of man, the beginnings of civilisation, the destruction of mankind and of all terrestrial animals (except those preserved in the ark) by a flood, the rise of separate nations, and the formation of different languages, is no historically true record of these events as they actually happened. . . . Fifty or sixty years ago, a different judgment, at least on some of the points involved, was no doubt possible: but the immense accessions of knowledge, in the departments both of the natural sciences and of the early history of man, which have resulted from the researches of recent years, make it impossible now: the irreconcilability of the early narratives of Genesis with the facts of science and history must be recognised and accepted."<sup>1</sup> For obvious reasons I have limited myself to quoting from Anglican writers of recognised position and reputation, but it is known to every one that the conclusions, cautiously and tentatively uttered by our English Scholars, are the

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Genesis*, p. lxi.



familiar commonplaces of the great critical schools of Europe, and the indispensable postulates of any theological teaching which can claim to be scientific. I have publicly confessed my conviction that the time has come for an honest recognition of critical results, and, as a first instalment of salutary change, I have asked for such a revision of the Lectionary as would remove from public use the many unhistorical and unedifying passages which, in accordance with an irrational and happily obsolete conception of Biblical inspiration, are now inflicted on our congregations, to their loss and, as I am persuaded, to the discredit of Christianity. In truth, my Lord, if the results of historical criticism are, indeed, to be banished from the current teaching, there will be need of an Anglican Index of a very comprehensive kind, and of authority strong and ubiquitous enough to enforce its prohibitions on the clergy, and hardly less on the laity.

5. Finally, I have maintained that there is nothing in the legal Subscriptions of the Anglican clergy which disallows the large liberty I have claimed, and which, as I have shown by sufficient examples, is actually enjoyed by prominent and representative ecclesiastics. On this point I may be permitted to refer your Lordship to some observations published last year, under the title *Sincerity and Subscription, a Plea for Toleration in the Church of England*. Inasmuch, however, as you directly challenged in your sermon the right of the clergy "without any formal leave from our Church, or on our own responsibility, to set aside the express



declaration of our Fourth Article," I take leave to make a few additional observations. It will not be contended that there is any special authority in the Fourth Article which should exempt it from the treatment recognised as proper in the case of the other Articles. The Assent which by the Clerical Subscription Act of 1865 was required from the Clergy was deliberately made as vague as was consistent with the retention of the principle of subscription: it replaced the intolerable form of assent exacted by the Caroline Act of Uniformity. The extent of the change is at once apparent when the two declarations are set side by side:—

1662.

I do here declare my unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed in and by the book entitled, etc.

1865.

I assent to the 39 Articles of Religion . . . and to the Book of Common Prayer, etc. I believe the doctrine of the Church of England, as therein set forth, to be agreeable to the Word of God.

Bishop Thirlwall's observations on the effect of the Clerical Subscription Act may well be recalled to mind at the present juncture. I quote from the charge of 1866:—

"That the Report on which that measure was founded, should have obtained the unanimous concurrence of so large a number of persons as composed the Royal Commission, representing every party in the Church, is one of the most remarkable and the most auspicious events of our day. It marks the crowning result of a reaction, that of Christian



wisdom and charity against the spirit and the policy which dictated the Act of Uniformity, passed amidst the narrow views and evil passions of the Restoration. The declared object of the new Act was to relieve tender consciences, by the alteration of forms which were designed to be as exclusive as possible, and which have no doubt excluded many from the ministry of the Church, and have perplexed and distressed many more within it. The principle of subscription is preserved, but its terms are so modified as to allow a much larger range to the freedom of private opinion. This range indeed, is not, and, consistently with the general intention of the Act, could not be exactly defined. The stress is laid not so much on the subscription itself, as on the character of the formularies, to which the subscription is required, and which the subscriber is to use in his public ministrations. It was thought that, from conscientious men, this was sufficient security ; while with others more explicit language would be of no avail. I consider this as not only a generous, but a just and wise confidence, and one certainly not more likely to be abused than the old jealousy to defeat its own purpose. But I think that it does tend to increase the difficulty of prosecutions for heresy, and to lessen their chances of success. Whether this is a consequence to be dreaded, or may not be the happiest settlement of the question about the Court of Appeal, I will not now stay to inquire. But I believe that, whether good or evil, it was not unforeseen or undesigned.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Remains*, vol. ii. pp. 144-145.



The "assent" which we profess to the Prayer Book and Articles is *not* an "unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed in and by" them. I suppose there never was any time since the Reformation in which the actual agreement implied by subscription was other than "general": but before the enfranchising Act of 1865, it is certain that the clergy were placed in a humiliating position, and the more conscientious they were in confessing their actual beliefs, the more completely were they at the mercy of the fanatical sections of the religious public. Dean Stanley's famous Letter to your Lordship's venerated predecessor, Bishop Tait, *On the State of Subscription in the Church of England and in the University of Oxford*, may be studied with advantage still. I take leave to make a single extract. "If," he wrote, "we pay due regard to the mind of the imposers, due regard to the counteracting qualifications of the different parts of the Formularies themselves, due regard to the common sense of mankind, and the opinions of English divines, due regard to the sense of Holy Scripture, at least wherever its expressions are used in the Formularies, there is not any section of the English Church, lay or clerical, which might not innocently subscribe to the present forms. But if once we press these subscriptions in their rigid and literal sense, as they have been, especially of late, so often pressed, without regard to all or any of these qualifications, then it may be safely asserted that in this respect there is not one clergyman in the Church who can venture to cast a stone at another—they



must all go out, from the greatest to the least, from the Primates at Lambeth and Bishopthorpe to the humblest curates of Wales or Westmorland.”<sup>1</sup> Dean Stanley could write thus in 1862, three years before the passing of the Clerical Subscription Act: how much more justly could his argument be pressed now since that Magna Carta of Anglican Liberty has been for more than a generation the palladium of Christian consciences from the insults of Christian fanaticism?

My Lord, the Fourth Article affirms what every Christian believes to be a vital truth—the Resurrection of Christ. So far we “assent” *ex animo* to it: but its affirmation is crude, materialistic, unsatisfactory, destitute of any trace of that “true ‘reverent agnosticism’ which”—as your Lordship justly said—“every Christian must feel about the precise nature of our Lord’s Resurrection body and its relationship to the earthly body,” and so far we cannot but ignore its terms. Herein we by no means treat in any exceptional way the Fourth Article, but only apply to it a treatment which we necessarily extend to all the Articles. To insist in 1904 on such a specific acceptance *au pied de la lettre* of the Anglican formularies as was already repudiated in 1862 would be to inflict on English clergymen what Mr. Matthew Arnold justly described as “an intolerable absurdity,” the pretence of “seeing Christianity through the spectacles of a number of second or third-rate men who lived in Queen Elizabeth’s time—men whose works one never

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Church and State*, p. 120.



dreams of reading for the purpose of enlightening and edifying oneself.”<sup>1</sup>

Such, then, have been the positions which for years past I have maintained in the pulpit, in magazine articles, in books. Let me recapitulate for the sake of lucidity. Which of these propositions is your Lordship prepared to disprove, as well as to condemn?

1. That the Creeds have no independent authority apart from the Scripture.
2. That the New Testament equally with the Old must be subjected frankly to the normal methods of criticism and interpretation.
3. That with the application of historical criticism to the primitive Christian documents, much that has hitherto passed as fact may very probably be found undeserving of that description.
4. That the well-authenticated results of historical criticism ought to be fairly recognised in Christian teaching.
5. That there is nothing in the legal Subscriptions of the Anglican clergy which disallows the large liberty implied in the preceding propositions.

My Lord, I am very reluctant to even appear to make any personal complaint, and yet I cannot see my way to avoid the obligation of pointing out that the purpose of the article in the *Hibbert Journal* has been largely misconceived.

The article was written to defend the thesis that

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Matthew Arnold*, vol. i. p. 206.



"in so far as the Creeds are statements of fact, they are properly subject to the testing and, perhaps, the revision of historical criticism. In so far as they are definitions of doctrine, they have no direct connection with historical science, and must stand for judgment at another tribunal." It is happily the case that there is nothing in the Creeds of Christendom which requires acceptance of the specific teaching of the Fourth Article; and it is not difficult to understand that the notion should suggest itself that the slender element of historical affirmation which enters into the statements of the Creeds with respect to our Lord's Resurrection might be exempted from the tests of historical science. But such exemption seemed to me plainly untenable, and therefore I took the two affirmations of the Creed which might seem absolutely secure—the "empty tomb" and the "third day"—and showed that even they were not so unassailable as common apologetics assume, that with respect even to them the tradition of the Church might eventually be corrected by historical science, and that, in that event, the Faith of Christendom was none the less secure. But I was not designing a detailed discussion of the critical questions, nor pretending to have reached a conclusion with respect to them. An article does not provide sufficient elbow-room for an elaborate argument. It may well be the case that "the question between a Bible construed critically and a Bible construed uncritically is far more a difference of process than of results";<sup>1</sup> but even so, results of

<sup>1</sup> Sanday, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 413.



critical investigation have not the same character, or the same claim on our acceptance, or the same power over us as the results of religious conviction ; and any confusion between the two, any attempt to clothe critical conclusions with the authority of Divine credenda, and to read into the necessarily provisional results of historical inquiry the vital and immutable character of Divine Truth, will surely draw in its train consequences hurtful to honest criticism, and not less hurtful to honest belief.

"Criticism," wrote Dr. Hort, "is not dangerous except when, as in so much Christian criticism, it is merely a tool for reaching a result not itself believed on that ground but on the ground of speculative postulates."<sup>1</sup> It will be an evil day for Christianity when of Biblical Criticism in the hands of Christians men shall be able to say, as was said of the Jesuit learning of the seventeenth century, that "it is a sham learning got up with great ingenuity in imitation of the genuine, in the service of the Church."<sup>2</sup> No thoughtful and reverent Christian can really doubt that a profound infidelity underlies the suggestion that the Religion of Christ, the Truth Incarnate, has anything to fear from the progress, free, unhampered, continuous, of scientific research ; yet no student of Christian History can be in any uncertainty as to the continual revision of theological thinking and statement which that progress has necessitated in the past, and cannot but necessitate in the future.

<sup>1</sup> *Hulsean Lectures*, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> M. Pattison, *Isaac Casaubon*, p. 521.



**xxx LETTER TO LORD BISHOP OF LONDON**

With the utmost respect for your Lordship's great office, and a deep regard and affection for your Lordship's person,

I am,

MY LORD BISHOP,

Your faithful Servant,

H. HENSLEY HENSON.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY,

*June 7, 1904.*



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I

B







# I

## THE VALUE OF THE BIBLE<sup>1</sup>

OH HOW I LOVE THY LAW ! IT IS MY MEDITATION ALL THE DAY. THY COMMANDMENTS MAKE ME WISER THAN MINE ENEMIES : FOR THEY ARE EVER WITH ME.—*Psalm cxix.* 97-98.

AND THEY RENT IN PIECES THE BOOKS OF THE LAW WHICH THEY FOUND, AND SET THEM ON FIRE. AND WHERESOEVER WAS FOUND WITH ANY A BOOK OF THE COVENANT, AND IF ANY CONSENTED TO THE LAW, THE KING'S SENTENCE DELIVERED HIM TO DEATH.—*1 Maccabees i.* 56-57.

THESE two passages illustrate one and the same remarkable fact, namely, the power of a religious literature to sustain faith and stimulate enthusiasm. In the 119th Psalm we have the characteristic witness of the post-Exilic period of Jewish history. The destruction of the national polity under Nebuchadnezzar had induced a remarkable literary activity among the Jews. Exiles from their own land, torn violently out of the context of their

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the Sunday after Ascension, May 11, 1902, on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society, in Canterbury Cathedral.



historic surroundings, deprived of those cardinal institutions of Church and State which are both the visible symbols and the principal supports of national unity, there was manifest and pressing danger that the Jews should lose their national individuality, and sink into the general mass of the population, amid which they were planted as colonists by their conquerors. With the individuality of Israel was inseparably bound up the fortune of Israel's most precious and distinctive possession—the Religion of Jehovah ; and on the preservation of that inestimable treasure was staked, as we know, the spiritual hope of mankind. The best Jews were dimly conscious of these vast issues ; piety united with patriotism to induce a temper of jealous and vigilant conservatism, which expressed itself in an anxious care for the yet surviving traditions of the national past, and in the tendency to collect, arrange, re-edit, and re-write the literary relics of the nation. The canon of the Old Testament gradually took shape, and, in the absence of an ecclesiastical system, rapidly drew to itself the religious affection of the people. The restoration of an ecclesiastical system could not arrest the tendency to magnify the Scriptures. In the circumstances of post-Exilic Israel, the temple, however venerable as the symbol



of national unity continuing in spite of the political disintegration of the race, could never again recover its old importance in religious experience. The Synagogue was the characteristic institution of the later Jews, and the Synagogue presupposed the Scripture. How precious and how powerful the influence of the Scripture became is well stated by an accomplished Jewish scholar of our day. "To the Jew," writes Mr. Claud Montefiore in his admirable *Hibbert Lectures*, "the law with its study has ever been the great spiritual stimulus. It has saved him from sacerdotalism and priestcraft. It supplied for him the place of every possible sort of intellectual, or artistic, or even professional activity, from which his peculiar religion on the one hand, and the intolerance of mediaeval society on the other, kept him effectively away. It was the study as well as the fulfilment of the law which prevented the Jews from sinking in the scale of manhood, throughout the middle ages, intellectually and even morally."<sup>1</sup>

The 119th Psalm, whether we regard it as the expression of the national feeling put into the mouth of personified Israel, or rather adopt the more attractive and, perhaps, not less legitimate view

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 495-96.



that it is the utterance of an individual mind, bears testimony in every verse to the "loving enthusiasm" which the Scriptures stirred in their students. It is difficult to make selections when every line throbs with one feeling, but consider such words as these, which will the better suit my present purpose, since they carry the suggestion that the speaker is suffering persecution:—"This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me exceedingly in derision: yet have I not swerved from Thy law." "The cords of the wicked have wrapped me round; but I have not forgotten Thy law." Trouble has brought home to him the worth of his Bible. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes. The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." He has been hard pressed by the temptation to betray his faith, but in his Bible he has never failed to find encouragement to hold on. "Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction. I will never forget Thy precepts: for with them Thou hast quickened me." Some of those about him are yielding to the persuasive casuistry of cowardice, and propitiating the persecutor by insincere recantations.



He finds in his Bible a robust scorn for such time-serving. "I hate them that are of a double mind : but Thy law do I love. . . . Depart from me, ye evil-doers ; that I may keep the commandments of my God." And withal as he reads the sacred and cherished pages, his heart overflows with an immense sorrow at the outrage and insult offered to Jehovah. "Mine eyes run down with rivers of water, because they observe not Thy law." The penetrating sense of the world's wickedness becomes in his sorrowful mind a temper of humility and penitence. The Bible, in strengthening him against temptation, makes his conscience tender ; in bringing home to his mind the dread reality of God's Presence in the world, destroys in him the spiritual pride which too often shadows the persecuted. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep ; seek Thy servant ; for I do not forget Thy commandments." Read the whole Psalm from the standpoint of a persecuted Jew, and you cannot miss the profound emotion which inspires it. You can be at no loss to understand why an astute and hostile observer fastened on the Scriptures as the principal religious influence among the Jews. Antiochus Epiphanes, who became to the Jews what Nero, at a later period, became to the Christians, the incarnation of anti-religious violence, seems to



have resembled Nero in many points. Both seem to have possessed, at least in youth, personal attractiveness ; both were covetous of popularity and unscrupulous in their methods of seeking it ; both were capricious and obstinate ; both were relentlessly cruel. Polybius tells us that "rational people were at a loss what to think about Antiochus. Some regarded him as a simple and homely man, others looked upon him as crazed." Probably in both tyrants there was a streak of madness. The Jews were obnoxious to Antiochus as constituting the most formidable obstacle to his policy of Hellenising his dominions. At one time, indeed, there seemed to be some prospect that they would fall in with his plans. There was a party in Jerusalem headed by Jason, the high-priest's brother, which ardently espoused everything Greek, and eagerly minimised everything distinctively national. Antiochus at first attempted to carry out his project by means of these unworthy Jews. Jason was made high-priest, and the great office which should have jealously guarded the faith of Israel became an active influence in its corruption. How far the process of apostasy advanced is sufficiently shown by the fact that the high-priest sent a contribution to the sacrificial festival of Hercules at the games celebrated every



fourth year at Tyre. The official church had thus gone over to the enemy ; the Jews were thrown back on their Bible ; there they found the inspiration of a courage which enabled them to repudiate their unworthy leaders, and, in the teeth of fearful odds, to recover their spiritual independence. In the books of Maccabees we have the record of that great conflict between a powerful state and the adherents of an unpopular creed. Antiochus was a thorough-going persecutor, and he was not without a measure of success. "Many of Israel consented to his worship, and sacrificed to the idols, and profaned the Sabbath"; but the body of the people stood firm, and offered a passive resistance. The king recognised the source of this surprising constancy in the Bibles widely distributed among the Jews. He determined, therefore, to destroy the literature, and thus cut off the sources of Jewish piety. "They rent in pieces the books of the law which they found, and set them on fire. And wheresoever was found with any a book of the covenant, and if any consented to the law, the king's sentence delivered him to death." I must not detain you longer with this fascinating history ; I only adduce it now as a remarkable testimony to the religious worth of a Bible in the hands of the people.



At that great crisis in the history of Israel, when the distinctiveness of Israel's Religion trembled in the balance, and the Jewish hierarchy played the traitor to the sacred interest it was ordained to guard, the spiritual salvation of Israel, and therein the whole religious future of mankind, were saved by the sacred Book. This is the more impressive when we remember that the Bible which inspired the heroism of those Jews, the Bible which moved the loving enthusiasm of the Psalmist, was a comparatively meagre volume. There was the law—perhaps, also, the book of the prophets—but the historical books and the other writings were probably not yet canonical; some of them, including the Book of Daniel, the Books of the Chronicles, and many of the Psalms, were almost certainly either not yet written, or so recently written as to be comparatively little known. Compared with the Christian Bible that was a meagre volume, and yet it was capable of exercising the wide and powerful influence which I have attempted to describe.

There is in the Christian Bible an element which hardly has any counterpart in the Jewish canon. The Gospels, in moral quality, in interest, in spiritual worth, in religious importance, are unique. That was a true instinct which induced our Christian ancestors



to show by visible and unmistakable tokens the special veneration with which they regarded the four Gospels. Significant ceremonies accompanied the reading of the Gospel in the public Liturgy ; the congregation (as is still the practice) stood to listen ; and, both before and after the reading, a short doxology was sung. The books of the Gospels were sumptuously prepared and preserved in caskets or cases often adorned with gems and the precious metals. Thus the Church affirmed the supremacy of the Gospels within the Bible, and uttered a protest, too soon forgotten, against the unintelligent but still prevailing habit of regarding all parts of the Bible as, in some sense, equally important. The habit has survived its logical bases. When Christians held a rigid, mechanical doctrine of inspiration, which required them to suppose the direct authority and exact truth of every verse in the Bible, it was practically impossible to arrange the books in a graduated order of merit, and to treat them in a spirit of reasonable discrimination. From this unfortunate lack of just distinction in estimating the books there followed, and do still follow, the most unhappy consequences. A genuine but unintelligent piety has too often fastened on specific passages of Scripture, and attributed to them the utmost



authority which could be conceded to Scripture as a whole ; and thus it has happened that the Bible has been bent to the service of the most disastrous fanaticisms which have cursed mankind. Let me but name in passing two notorious and suggestive examples. It was this unintelligent view of the Bible which betrayed Luther and Melanchthon, and, more than a century later, perhaps also our own Burnet,<sup>1</sup> into the monstrous contention that polygamy was not essentially incompatible with Christianity. They saw that polygamy had existed in ancient Israel ; they did not find any express and categorical prohibition of it in the New Testament ; their theory bound them to hold that the teaching of the Old Testament, save only where it had been explicitly abrogated, was binding on Christians ; and so, not, indeed, without misgivings, for they were genuine Christians and felt the falseness of their position, they were led to their disastrous error. Again, we all

<sup>1</sup> The point is not free from doubt. Burnet had been consulted on the point whether the queen's barrenness would justify divorce or polygamy on the part of Charles II. He says that he replied in the negative, but there is a paper extant, supposed to be his, which maintains the affirmative.

In Philip of Hesse's case there is no doubt. The "Opinion" sent to him by Luther and Melanchthon, and written by the latter, is explicit. "That which is permitted concerning marriage in the law of Moses is not forbidden in the Gospel."



know the tyrannous severity with which the Puritans insisted on forcing on Christians the Jewish law as to the Sabbath. They based themselves on the Old Testament, which they wrongly assumed to have the full authority of Scripture for the practical guidance of Christian people. We know how grave mischiefs have followed. The sacred obligation resting upon all Christians to keep holy the Lord's Day has been compromised and imperilled by the Sabbatarian severity, which bound the abrogated Jewish law upon the Church of Christ. It would be easy to multiply examples of this kind. There is the miserable case of slavery, justified even to the latter half of the nineteenth century by appeals to the Old Testament. There is the not less miserable case of the persecution of witches, accepted as a Christian duty by good men only on the authority of the Old Testament, and the occasion of an infinite mass of cruelty and suffering. The fundamental error, which induced these evils, yet lingers among us. I have myself seen the use of incense in Christian worship urged as binding on Christian men, because in the Old Testament it is represented as divinely enacted; and constantly in current religious literature the Old Testament is drawn upon for proofs in the same indiscriminating, unintelligent spirit. Now it seems to me that one



loving enthusiasm of the Psalmist, and echoes his ardent words with a wealth of meaning in them which he could not have imagined. "Oh how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandments make me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me."

Now let me turn for a few minutes before I conclude to the object which we are invited to assist to-night. Ninety-eight years ago the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed for the purpose of circulating the Bible throughout the world. In 1826 the Society, for reasons which I do not know and cannot guess, adopted an attitude of hostility to the Apocrypha. Thus some of the most precious of the sacred writings of the Jews—writings which have nourished Christian piety and guided Christian practice from the first—have been excluded from the Society's action, and a mutilated Bible has been given to the world. What justifications could be pleaded at the time for this extraordinary decision I cannot imagine, but I am sure they have lost their force, whatever they were, and I earnestly hope that the Society will see its way to retire from a position which diminishes its usefulness and compromises its reputation. It is, I believe, the case that quite recently the Society has decided



to circulate the Revised Version as well as the "Authorised" Version of the Bible. That is a step in the right direction. Absolute honesty in handling the word of God ought to be the governing principle of such a Society as this, and absolute honesty is hardly consistent with total neglect of admittedly the most faithful version of the Scriptures in the English tongue. Why, let me ask, should we support the circulation of the Bible throughout the world? Broadly, I apprehend, for three reasons.

In the interest of the national morality, the more widely you can disseminate the Bible the better. For the Bible, after all is said, is everywhere inspired by the conviction that God is righteous, and that apart from righteousness there is no such thing as genuine religion. The whole gist of the Old Testament is summed up in that great oracle of Micah which has been called the noblest utterance of the Old Testament. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." This doctrine that religion implies morality, and that morality expresses religion, is eminently needed in an age which magnifies what it calls morality at the expense of what it calls religion. There is

C



among us much social enterprise, much zeal for social reform, and even, in some quarters, much enthusiasm for social service; but there is a dangerous indifference to that condition which alone can make all these permanent and salutary, the condition of a strong, upright, consecrated character. Men stop short at the first clause of St. James's definition of acceptable religion; they do not embrace the last, which none the less is inseparable from the other. "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The Bible, widely spread among the people, has a morally bracing effect. But this is not all. The Gospels contain the record of the perfect human Life; there in those consecrated pages, as in a crystal, men see the lines of their duty, not in cold, rigid statute, but in a winning and venerable personality. Jesus Christ stands before them in His purity, His strength, His tenderness, His sorrow; and men perforce confess the majesty of His character, and the authority of His example. Think what it means that in an age when men's minds are fired and debased by the sordid dreams of materialism, when the strain of economic strife



grows daily more severe, and the madness of oppression stirs in many crushed and blighted spirits, there should always and everywhere be this Pattern of Jesus sustained before our people, rebuking materialism, mitigating the rigour of economic strife, restoring the sanity of patience to the oppressed. Ill will it be for us when from our troubled eager life that Voice of Jesus dies away: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

In the interest of Christian Missions, the more widely the Scriptures are spread abroad the better. Why were the early preachers of the Gospel able to find a foothold for their message in the populations of the Roman Empire? Precisely, because the Old Testament had been translated into Greek, and carried everywhere throughout the Empire by the Jews of the Dispersion. Has it not sometimes struck you as a very astonishing thing that St. Paul should be able to assume even in his Gentile converts so considerable an acquaintance with the Old Testament? The fact indicates one of the



principal conditions of his evangelistic success. The Synagogue system and the Greek version of the Scriptures had prepared his way wherever he went. So it is with the modern preachers of Christianity at home and abroad. A preliminary acquaintance with the Bible paves the way for the spoken message, and makes men's minds ready to receive it. And if from the Nation we turn to the Church, the same conclusion leaps to the eyes.

In the interest of Christian unity, the more widely you can spread the Bible the better. The only hope of reaching that recovery of Christian fraternity, which is increasingly seen to be the prime need of our time, is in the rectifying of our sense of proportion. We must be able to distinguish clearly between the essentials of the Faith and those things which, however venerable and dear to us, are not essential; and we must be willing to insist only on essentials as conditions of restoring fellowship. Where can we get this spirit of just discrimination but in the close, affectionate, reverent study of the original literature of Christendom? When the "mind of Christ," therein reflected with unique fidelity, has really been communicated to the Church, so that His scale of relative importance is adopted and applied, and His spirit controls



the relations of Christians with one another, then, indeed, we shall see all things justly, and get the better of our prejudices, and rise superior to our traditions of conflict. In His light we shall see light, and again, as at the first, build our fellowship on the Rock of the sublime and simple confession of His supreme Lordship.



## II

### THE BIBLE IN THE MODERN CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

YE SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, BECAUSE YE THINK THAT IN THEM YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE: AND THESE ARE THEY WHICH BEAR WITNESS OF ME: AND YE WILL NOT COME TO ME THAT YE MAY HAVE LIFE.—*St. John* v. 39-40.

GOD, HAVING OF OLD TIME SPOKEN UNTO THE FATHERS IN THE PROPHETS BY DIVERS PORTIONS AND IN DIVERS MANNERS, HATH AT THE END OF THESE DAYS SPOKEN UNTO US IN HIS SON.—*Hebrews* i. 1.

THE centenary celebration of the British and Foreign Bible Society cannot but arrest the attention and provoke the curiosity of thoughtful men. It is indeed difficult to find any historical parallel to this celebration, for the ordinary springs of enthusiasm are in this case conspicuously absent. Patriotism, national pride, the passionate devotion moved in countless minds by a hero or benefactor, the ardent,

<sup>1</sup> Preached in Westminster Abbey on the third Sunday in Lent, March 6, 1904, in connection with the centenary of the British and Foreign Bible Society.



even fierce attachment which masses of men feel for the church of their fathers, or the cause to which they have dedicated themselves—all are wanting to, or, at most, enter indirectly and in slight measure into, this great centenary celebration. It is international and inter-denominational. Consider the impressiveness of those two characters. Of all the forces which divide mankind, are not these among the most potent and intractable—difference of nationality, and difference of religious denomination? How deep must be the community of sentiment which can prevail over both these alienating factors, and draw men of different nations and of different churches into harmony! This is an imposing demonstration of the solidarity of Protestant Christendom—yes, the line falls there; it is not Christendom as a whole, but Protestant Christendom which can unite in rejoicing over the marvellous circulation of the Scriptures throughout the world, which this great Society, now a hundred years old, has, by the blessing of Almighty God, been able to effect. Protestant Christendom came into existence as the creature of the open Bible; everywhere it built itself, as best it could, on the sacred Scriptures; and now, after nearly four centuries of varied experience, it still stands on the old foundation, and



is recognised by the old tokens. We sometimes hear, indeed, in England, contemptuous allusions to the word Protestant, and eager assurances that the National Church of England is not so to be described. The statement is absurd in history and in law; the justifications offered for it have no relevance to the issue which is really at stake. To-day, the National Church of England shakes off the elaborate webs of sophistry with which her true character is too often obscured, and takes her stand frankly as a member of the family of Protestant Churches, co-heritor and co-trustee with her sisters of the treasure of religious liberty which was secured by the Reformation. There is, indeed, urgent need that the Protestantism of the English Church should be cleared from all suspicion; for only so can she recover her imperilled hold on the confidence of the English people,—only so can she hope to take any steps towards that unification of the Protestant Churches which is ever more clearly seen to be the most pressing of all our religious problems. The preacher in this famous Church cannot forget that he speaks in a citadel of Protestantism. Westminster Abbey and the English Bible are indissolubly associated. The most distinguished of King James's translators, to whom we owe the



Authorised Version, was Andrewes, who was connected with this Church both as prebendary and as Dean. The most variously eminent, perhaps, of the scholars who, a generation ago, revised that version, was Westcott, whom some of you will yet remember as Canon of Westminster. The great work was carried out under the hospitable roof of Dean Stanley, himself one of the Revisers. The Revision was inaugurated by a memorable celebration of Holy Communion in Henry VII.'s Chapel, and almost all the Revisers, including several Scotch Presbyterians and English Nonconformists, received the Blessed Sacrament of Christian Fellowship. The Revised Version, be it always remembered, was the achievement of English-speaking Christendom as a whole ; only the Roman Catholic Church, of the great English-speaking denominations, refused to take part in the undertaking. The Preface of the Revisers is dated from Jerusalem Chamber, Westminster Abbey ; so that it is the case that wherever men use that admirable version, which brings to the English reader the results of modern learning and research in probably the most faithful rendering of the Scriptures existing in any vernacular, there the name of this great Church is connected with the Bible. You will understand how all this has an



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interest and an importance for a Westminster preacher on such an occasion as this. He cannot forget that the exaltation and distribution of the Bible are the traditions of this place.

But it will be felt that more needs to be said here than mere gratulation, however legitimate that may be. We cannot, even in an hour of natural enthusiasm, banish from our minds the unpalatable fact that the Bible has come of recent years to be made the subject of much questioning and some openly-expressed contempt. A change has passed upon Christian feeling with respect to the Bible; and the change is reflecting itself in the language and practice of Christians. To speak quite frankly, we have come to understand that the Bible has been extensively misconceived by the Church, and we are not a little embarrassed by the fact that the place which the Bible holds in the system and custom of the Church was determined, to no small extent, by that misconception. Educated Christians no longer listen with unresisting acquiescence, as their forefathers listened, to narratives in the Old Testament which seem incredible, or puerile, or actually, in their tendency, demoralising. They are perplexed on the matter of what is called the "inspiration" of the Bible. They know that "inspiration" is no longer



allowed by scholars any influence on interpretation. It cannot establish the truthfulness of any statement against the verdict of historical critics; it cannot authorise any doctrine which has against it the reason and the conscience of Christian men. "Proof-texts" are at a discount, and "harmonies" are no more in request. And when once the notion of inspiration as authenticating the Scripture has been laid aside, and the Scripture stands on the same level as all other literature in this respect, that it has no other claim on acceptance than that of its own intrinsic merit, then a hundred questions are immediately suggested. What must be understood as implied in canonicity? Beyond the merely formal sense of ecclesiastical acceptance and liturgical use, does canonicity mean anything to the modern Christian? It certainly does not affect his personal estimate of the books themselves. The canonicity of the Book of Esther, for example, will not hinder him from thinking meanly of it; nor will the absence of canonicity hinder him from valuing highly the Book of Wisdom. The modern Christian student ignores both inspiration and canonicity, and takes the Books of the Bible on their merits. And these he sees to be very unequal: some books, or parts of books, seem to satisfy the most exalted theory of



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their character and composition ; others seem to fall far below the level of the best profane literature. Moreover, the modern Christian is always being challenged on the subject of the Bible. Why does he give it that unique place in his system? Why does he insist on reading to congregations tiresome chapters from the legal books, or strange legends about the patriarchs, when the accumulated treasures of Christian devotional literature are at his disposal unused, and, by the mass of believers, unknown? It is, perhaps, a matter of general agreement among thoughtful Christians, that the time has come for a serious reconsideration of the uses now made of the Bible. Since it is certain that we no longer hold the traditional notions about the Bible, it would seem but reasonable, not to say also prudent, to bring our usage into line with our actual belief. We want expurgated Bibles for the use of children, for the use of converts from heathenism, for the public reading in the churches. The principle of expurgation, or of selection (which is really the same thing), has always been accepted by Christians. Every parent and teacher has made choice of such parts of Scripture as seemed to him suitable for the children whom he aspired to teach ; and no doubt missionaries have always exercised a discretion in putting



Scripture into the hands of their converts. The mere existence of authorised lectionaries implies selection ; so far, there is nothing novel in the proposal to expurgate and select. What is novel is the drastic character of the changes which would be required in order to satisfy the requirements of the present situation. Only the astonishing power of custom could blind us to the intrinsic unreasonableness of much that now proceeds in our public services ; and, unless I greatly mistake, the source of that unhappy contempt for the Scriptures which is certainly spreading among our people must be sought for within the Christian camp itself.

Enough has been said to make plain to you that in standing here to-day as a whole-hearted supporter of the work carried on by the Bible Society, I am under no delusion as to the difficult circumstances which now determine the use of the Scriptures ; that I am by no means disposed to minimise the change which has taken place in educated Christian opinion with respect to the Bible, and that I hold very strongly that, in the interest of Religion, the time has come for reconsidering the ecclesiastical treatment of the Scriptures. Now, without risk of being misunderstood, I may, perhaps, be permitted to advance some reasons why I believe that though



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in the future the place held by the Bible in the system of the Church will be different, yet it will not be less important ; that, in truth, the Bible must remain, in a most true sense, the rule of faith and the ultimate court of appeal in religious controversy. Perhaps it may be added that, in the future as in the past, the dividing line between the Christianity of Protestants and the Christianity which calls itself Catholic will fall precisely where the treatment of the Bible is in question. Into this point, however, I shall not enter this afternoon, as it would carry us too far afield from our main discussion.

First of all, it may be well to emphasise one aspect of modern opinion about the Bible which, especially by those who most frankly recognise the changes to which reference has been made, is too often forgotten. The spiritual primacy of our sacred books among the multitudes of compositions which together constitute the religious literature of mankind, is now assured, as never before. Never before has comparison been possible on the same scale, and under such equitable conditions. Sympathetic scholars have translated into modern languages the Sacred Books of the venerable Religions of Asia. There is much in those books which appeals to us, and moves our sympathy ; there can be found in



them, scattered here and there in the voluminous mass, oracles of Divine Truth which our consciences acknowledge ; but, when all that justice can require, or sympathy can suggest, has been said, can it be denied that by comparison with the Christian Scriptures those sacred Books of India, China, Persia, and Arabia are as water to wine, or as starlight to the noonday? I am not denying either the excellences of the latter or the defects of the former. My proposition claims to be a simple statement of indisputable fact. We can face the modern world with the secure conviction that our Bible, after all is said, holds the spiritual primacy of the world's literature. Former generations of Christians, enchained by arbitrary and mechanical theories of inspiration, failed to recognise the true greatness of the treasure they had received. They poured out their affections upon, and engirdled with the beauties of their consecrated fancy, books which were intrinsically undeserving of their homage. St. Gregory, for example, selected the Book of Job to be the text of his celebrated *Moralia*, in which, by the aid of the fantastic method of allegory, he succeeded in reading into the old Hebrew drama the whole theory of the Christian Church and sacraments as he understood them, as well as a condemnation of all the



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heresies he knew. St. Bernard chose as the subject of his spiritual reflection that least spiritual of the Scriptures, the so-called Song of Solomon, which even the Jews of the first century hesitated to admit as canonical, and which modern scholars agree to be, in plan and purpose, frankly secular. There seemed, indeed, almost a perverse preference for the least spiritual Scriptures as if the unattractiveness of their aspect were an indication of more than commonly precious secrets of Divine Truth. An arbitrary theory of inspiration placed all canonical Scriptures on the same level, and authorised, nay required, that indiscriminating use which has, in point of fact, been traditional in Christendom. We, happily free from that paralysing incubus, can bring the Scriptures to the test of conscience, and prove them in experience; and if, so doing, we banish from our devotional use much that formerly seemed serviceable, we are able to concentrate our affection on those parts of the Bible which need no arbitrary doctrine of inspiration or canonicity to command our hearts. What Mr. Prothero has written, well and eloquently, about the Psalms, may, with equal justice, be extended to many other parts of the Bible. "The Psalms are a mirror in which each man sees the motions of his own soul. They



express in exquisite words the kinship which every thoughtful human heart craves to find with a supreme, unchanging, loving God, who will be to him a protector, guardian, and friend. They utter the ordinary experiences, the familiar thoughts of men; but they give to these a width of range, an intensity, a depth, and an elevation, which transcend the capacity of the most gifted. They translate into speech the spiritual passion of the loftiest genius; they also utter, with the beauty born of truth and simplicity, and with exact agreement between the feeling and the expression, the inarticulate and humble longings of the unlettered peasant.”<sup>1</sup>

Are not such confessions of our own age a luminous commentary on the words in which Christ has declared the abiding function of the Scriptures? “These are they which bear witness of Me.” That element within us which is akin to Christ, by which we also can rise to the heights of His perfect manhood, in which we know ourselves to be sons of God, responds to the appeal of the Scriptures, and thus takes security of their character. “In the Bible,” wrote Coleridge, “there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put

<sup>1</sup> *The Psalms in Human Life*, p. 2.



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together ; the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being ; and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit." <sup>1</sup>

The authority of the Bible, discovered in such confessions, lies beyond the reach of all criticism ; and, indeed, is only brought into the more impressive prominence as criticism clears away whatsoever is morally repulsive or intellectually intolerable.

When we pass from the Old Testament to the New, it almost seems an insult to the intelligence of Christian folk to elaborate arguments in proof of what is self-evident, the supreme and perpetual worth of the Bible. All we know about the Life and Doctrine of our Master Christ is contained within that slender volume which, thanks to the British and Foreign Bible Society, is, among us, as cheap as the daily newspaper. Controversialists have debated often and largely about Tradition as a co-equal, or at least a supplemental source of knowledge ; but it becomes clearer every day that the New Testament includes practically all that has survived from the evangelical age. What Chillingworth wrote in the middle of the seventeenth

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, Letter ii.



century is seen to be more than ever true at the start of the twentieth. "Nothing besides Scripture comes to us with as full a Stream of Tradition as Scripture," and, therefore, "Scripture alone, and no unwritten doctrine, nor no infallibility of any Church, having attestation from Tradition truly universal" is "the rule to judge all controversies by."<sup>1</sup>

We hear much from some quarters about a doctrine of ecclesiastical development which shall entitle to our reverent acceptance the entire mass of current belief and practice; and the inference is as obvious as it is irresistible that we may dispense with appealing to the New Testament when we seek the very truth of Christ, and may—nay, in duty must—accept without questioning what lies to our hand. Granting freely that there is a legitimate application of the notion of development to Christianity, I cannot but demur to any application which has the practical effect of deposing the New Testament from its traditional supremacy as the ultimate court of appeal within the Church. In truth, I suspect there is confusion of thought implied in the common use of these terms "development" and "evolution" in our religious discussions. There is a sense in which the Thames flowing darkly and broadly under

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, p. 126, tenth edition. London, 1742.



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London Bridge is a development of the slender, limpid springs in the Cotswolds, but it is not quite the same sense as that in which the oak is a development of the acorn, or the Empire of Constantine a development of the Roman Republic. When we speak of development with respect to the beliefs or practices of the Christian Church, what kind of development have we in our mind? Perhaps the illustration of a great river is the most helpful in our present discussion. The broad muddy stream which enters the sea can serve a thousand interests, but if it be drinking water you want, you had best betake you to the primitive sources in the hills. So with Christianity, that strange amalgam of truth and falsehood, the spiritual and the secular, which is before us in the Christendom we know, is unquestionably potent for good in many directions; but if you want the water of life, the primitive truth of the Gospel, you had best remount the stream of historic Christianity, and slake your soul's thirst at the fountain of living water, where it flows freshly and freely in the New Testament. Wherever that sacred book is found, be it in the heart of paganism, or in the sanctuaries of corrupted Christianity, or in the moral desolation of our derelict modern life, there the Divine Lord stands again, as at the first, and



cries, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." No criticism can ever shake this supremacy of the New Testament; nay, so far as I can judge, the broad effect of criticism has been to establish that supremacy in more luminous prominence, and on securer (if that were possible) bases. As the Church grows old, the Gospel remains new; amid the wreckage of the centuries, the Gospel stands in the fresh vigour of a life drawn from no earthly source. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, yea, and for ever." Would you help this troubled modern world, as it sinks beneath the weight of its cares, and loses heart and hope in the effort to assuage its own insatiable and multiplying appetites? Spread abroad in it this Book of Comfort, Righteousness, and Hope. Would you save our distracted Christendom, failing under the shame of its immense perversions, confused by the mass of its responsibilities, torn by its inexorable factions, dismayed by the magnitude of its problems? Send forth this Book of Truth, Courage, and Charity. Society is stricken, men are saying; the Church is paralysed. "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?" Yes, the old Gospel, old and always new,



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remains, and in it there is still the healing of the Nations and the resurrection of the Church, for there is brought to us, in kindly fashion of our common lot, One, who claims us as His Brethren, and lifts us with Himself to God.



### III

## THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

FOR WHATSOEVER THINGS WERE WRITTEN AFORETIME WERE WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING, THAT THROUGH PATIENCE AND THROUGH COMFORT OF THE SCRIPTURES WE MIGHT HAVE HOPE.—  
*Romans xv. 4.*

ST. PAUL has just quoted a passage from the 69th Psalm and applied it to Christ, and here, in the text, he justifies his action on the ground that the Scriptures, which, of course, in his mouth mean only the sacred writings of Israel, have an abiding value. In the second Pastoral Epistle the apostolic doctrine as to the same Scriptures is still more clearly stated in a passage which we may usefully have before us on the present occasion. "Every Scripture inspired of God," we read, "is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the second Sunday in Advent, December 6, 1903, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



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complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

It is perhaps easy to read more into St. Paul's words than they properly contain ; certainly it is not an universal validity which is affirmed, nor an indiscriminating use which is suggested. Even in asserting the value of the Scriptures, the apostle indicates the limitations of that value. "Two points St. Paul teaches: the permanent value of the great moral and spiritual truths of the Old Testament, and the witness of the Old Testament to Christ. His words cannot be quoted to prove more than this."<sup>1</sup>

Christianity, we know, grew out of Judaism, and in its earliest stage had the aspect of a reformed Jewish religion. We do not always remember that, in the age which witnessed the final ruin of the Jewish national polity, the Jewish Religion, though still in theory passionately nationalist, was yet organised as an international association, and engaged in an eager propagandising. The Synagogue and the Septuagint were potent solvents of Jewish nationalism: the one undermined the local patriotism which found its sacred centre in the Temple worship; the other set the Jews free from the trammels of a language, already becoming obsolete, and brought

<sup>1</sup> Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. 396.



them by right of their literature into the very centre of intellectual activity. The Old Testament, read in Greek by men who had grown up in a Greek atmosphere, and were familiar with Greek philosophy, was a new book. Read indeed simply, as a record of fact, it presented at every turn spiritual paradoxes and moral crudities which were to the Greek mind intolerable; but then, alongside with these, it exhibited a religious and ethical superiority to his own literature so manifest that, in spite of his resentment, the Greek could not withhold his admiration. An escape from this contradiction was discovered by the acceptance of arbitrary and, to modern thinking, fantastic methods of interpretation. The true sense of Scripture, it was maintained, is not that which lies on the surface of the text, but that which is buried in the text as a treasure in the earth, or concealed in it as a message in cipher. The more crude and offensive the text, the more likely to enshrine, as in an unusually careful protection, a precious spiritual truth. A whole system of exegetic rules was devised, by means of which the hidden sense might be discovered; and that allegorical interpretation, which had mitigated for the Greeks the repulsive features of the Old Testament, lay ready to the hand of Christian expositors when, in



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their turn, they should come to the same Scriptures with new requirements. In short, the Old Testament with which the first disciples had to make their count was already extensively spiritualised by the allegorists of Alexandria. "Nothing was what it seemed, but was only the symbol of something invisible. The history of the Old Testament was here sublimated to a history of the emancipation of reason from passion."<sup>1</sup>

So long as Christianity remained within the Jewish sphere, the authority of the Old Testament remained unquestioned, and the current interpretation, always with a reference to Christ, served all the purposes of the Church; but when, thanks mainly to the missionary achievements of St. Paul, the Gospel had been carried to the great centres of non-Jewish life, the cities of the Empire, then, necessarily, a new situation was created. The Old Testament was intensely national in itself and, still more, in the exposition of the Rabbis throughout the synagogues of the Dispersion; and this wider Christianity, which embraced on equal terms both Jews and Gentiles, was the very negation of nationalism. As the Old Testament had had to be spiritualised by the Jewish allegorists in order to

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *History of Dogma*, i. 223.



propitiate the philosophy of the Greeks, so now it was equally required to be spiritualised further by the Christian allegorists in order to satisfy the catholicity of the Church. "The exposition of the Old Testament," observes Harnack, "turned it into a Christian book."<sup>1</sup>

Christian teachers went, indeed, strange lengths in their zeal to Christianise the Old Testament. They did not scruple even to tamper with the text of the Septuagint in order to make it the more suitable to their purpose ; and they were willing to press as Scripture dubious apocryphal books rejected by the Jews from their canon, because these seemed to be serviceable to their cause. It is hard to trace a line where honest zeal passes over into conscious fraud. We know but too well how curiously easy it is for men to believe what they want to believe, and we need not travel far in search of examples to prove the dangerous credulity of enthusiasm. When Tertullian urges the apocryphal book of Enoch as having the authority of Scripture, in spite of the fact that it was not included in the Jewish canon of Scripture, he naively makes his own convictions the premisses of his argument. Enoch, he says, prophesies of Christ, and we Christians know that

<sup>1</sup> *History of Dogma*, i. 156.



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every edifying Scripture is inspired of God. The Jews of course reject this, as they reject other Scriptures, simply because it testifies to Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Christians of the early ages first read what they wanted into the text, and then made the orthodoxy of the text a ground for holding it to be canonical Scripture. Fortunately the instincts of those primitive reasoners were sounder than their logic, and truer than their interpretations. We must not be swift to condemn those whom we cannot hesitate to correct. We may, however, take notice that the arbitrary and, as we now judge, indefensible methods of the orthodox were opposed to, perhaps were connected with, greater extravagances on the part of their heretical opponents. The repudiation of the Old Testament became the common mark of those early Christian thinkers whom we gather under the general description—Gnostics. Thus, to give a single example, the most interesting and influential of these sectaries, Marcion, who flourished in the middle of the second century, and may have been born within the lifetime of St. John, rejected the Old Testament, and was necessarily carried to the further rejection of all that great part of the New Testament which bears witness to

<sup>1</sup> *De cultu feminarum*, i. 3.



the Old. We must not, indeed, attribute to such conduct the extreme gravity which would have attached to it in later times, when the canon of the New Testament had been formed, and had taken rank in the belief of Christians as an equally inspired supplement to the older Scriptures. Marcion well illustrates the difficulties under which those early Christian thinkers felt themselves to lie with respect to the Old Testament. Rejecting the orthodox method of surmounting obstacles by the convenient but essentially irrational method of allegorical interpretation, and ignorant (as all the world remained for many centuries to come) of a sound historical method, he was compelled to face in their unmitigated repulsiveness all those large elements in the Old Testament which we now explain easily enough as the reflection of primitive theology and undeveloped morals. Marcion is said to have asked the Roman presbyters to explain the texts, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit," and "No man putteth a piece of a new cloth unto an old garment,"—texts "from which he himself deduced that works in which evil is to be found could not proceed from the good God, and that the Christian dispensation could have nothing in common with the Jewish."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, iii. 817.



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He found, as he thought, in the Old Testament a transcript of the universe itself, and, accordingly, he offered for both the same explanation. Both, he said, proceeded from another author than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Possessed by this notion, he set to work with the ardent courage of a genuine enthusiast to fashion the Scriptures in accordance with it. The Old Testament was swept away altogether; a New Testament was constructed to serve his theory by a drastic rejection of some apostolic writings, and a no less drastic revision of others. He defended his work with energy, and it has survived in great part even to the present time in the vehement and voluminous attacks of his orthodox contemporaries. "He demonstrated the contradictions between the Old Testament and the Gospel in a voluminous work," called the *Antitheses*, and this work was regarded as canonical by his followers.

Marcion was typical of a strong and general tendency in the early Church—a tendency which, having its springs in contemporary non-Christian thought, was properly dualistic and pessimistic, and being such, found itself in conflict with the fundamental and pervading assumptions of the Old Testament. However unsatisfactory the exegetic



methods of the Church may have been, yet it is but bare justice to the Christian writers to admit that the firm resistance they offered to every attempt to belittle or repudiate the Jewish Scriptures was inspired by a just perception of the issues at stake. They felt that, in holding fast to the Old Testament, they were clinging to the true bases of their Christian Creed, the belief in the Unity of God, and the belief in the future life. The Creator of the Universe and the God whom Jesus Christ revealed were in Christian thought necessarily identical, so long as the Mission of Christ was seen in its historic succession from the inspired life of Israel ; and the moral confusion of the universe, as it expressed itself in the conflict of good and evil in the record of mankind, and in the life of individual men, was prevented from binding on Christians the dreary conclusions of the dualist and the pessimist so long as that moral confusion was always held in close contact with the inveterate Jewish conviction uttered by the prophets, psalmists, and sages of the Jewish Bible, that, behind and beyond the present age, were ages to come, in which judgment, rectification, penalty and reward, would follow upon the life of earth.

“ The great inheritance which the Gentile Christian communities received from Judaism,” it has been said,



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"is the eschatological hopes, along with the Monotheism assured by revelation and belief in Providence."<sup>1</sup> Neither of these could have been preserved apart from the Old Testament, and therefore the course of action pursued by the ecclesiastical leaders, throughout the second and third centuries, when the position of the Old Testament within the Christian Church was powerfully and repeatedly assailed, can now be seen to have been inspired by a just estimate of its abiding worth. We need not judge harshly the old Gnostics, whom the Church successfully resisted ; we may admit the gravity of the difficulties which confronted them ; we may lament the severity with which orthodox theologians treated their speculations, but we can have no manner of doubt as to the rightness of the orthodox decision. St. Paul's words (which Marcion appears to have conveniently ignored) have resting on them the confirming verdict of Christian experience through nineteen centuries, as we read them to-day : "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."

It is well known that the long-continued dominion of the Bible, and especially of the Old Testament, is

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, i. 168, note.



again being subjected to attack. It is not the only point of similarity which the thoughtful student of Christian history can discern between the age of Marcion and Tertullian, and the age of Renan and Harnack. As, then, the champions of the Bible damaged their cause, unconsciously of course, but not the less gravely, by using the intrinsically irrational exegesis of allegorism and the morally indefensible method of tampering with the text, so now the Christian cause is, in too many quarters, weakened by unreason and unscrupulousness. In claiming for the Bible more than belongs to it, we run the risk of prejudicing its rightful authority. Remembering this, and vigilant to recognise all the truth, even though surprising and at first unwelcome to our minds, which may be urged on us from whatever side, let us be quite confident on the main question. The Christian Church can never think lightly of the Scriptures, or dispense with the wisdom of accumulated experience which they embody, or minimise the spiritual worth of the revelation which they contain and convey. And the individual believer starves his own soul if he deprives himself of that "comfort of the Scriptures" which is the sustenance of Christian hope. You will never find, I think—I can honestly say for myself that I have

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never found—any student of the Bible, not pre-occupied with a hostile motive, speak lightly of it. Those who are not students, who, indeed, are so ignorant of the sacred volume that they would be hard put to it if they were asked to find the words which from its pages they take to point a silly jest or adorn an unworthy gibe, do belittle and insult the Bible, and, as far as I know, they—apart from avowed opponents—alone. Unhappily the knowledge of the Bible, and the habit of its constant use, no longer are as common among us as once was the case, and this circumstance, so discreditable to Christian parents and, in a less degree, to Christian ministers, greatly facilitates the work of those, of whom too many are now active in the nation, who are consciously and of set purpose toiling for the destruction of all that is definitely Christian in English life and thought. It would be an easy task to set before you a mass of weighty testimonies to the preciousness of the Bible—testimonies from all the Christian centuries, and never more freely than from the latest. Last week, to name an instance which comes readily to my hand, there issued from the press a remarkable and most suggestive volume, which I will ask you to permit me to commend to your attention. It is called *The*



*Psalms in Human Life*, and its author is one of the best known and most accomplished of our men of letters, Mr. Rowland Prothero. The purpose of the book is stated to be "to collect together some of the countless instances in which the Psalms have guided, controlled, and sustained the lives of men and women in all ages of human history, and at all crises of their fate."<sup>1</sup> That such a purpose should inspire the labours of a prominent literary man in our own time is surely an impressive comment on the words of St. Paul: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope." What is true of the Psalms is hardly less true of the prophetic books, and is in some measure true of the less spiritual books of the Old Testament; and, when we pass from the Old Testament to the New, everything rises to a still higher plane. Think of the "comfort of the Scriptures" which is stored in those brief oracles which in a few minutes will be spoken at the altar to those of you who remain to the Holy Communion. Try to think of what our life would be if the comfort and hope of the Gospel died out of it; and then, in audience of those "comfortable words," in view of that un-

<sup>1</sup> P. 10.



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utterable blankness of despair, make your own the familiar petition which the Church of England prescribes for our help to-day, and pledge yourself henceforth to make a worthier use of God's great gift to you in the Bible. "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning : Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of Thy Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ."



## IV

### THE SONG OF DEBORAH<sup>1</sup>

THEN SANG DEBORAH AND BARAK THE SON OF ABINOAM ON THAT DAY, SAYING, FOR THAT THE LEADERS TOOK THE LEAD IN ISRAEL, FOR THAT THE PEOPLE OFFERED THEMSELVES WILLINGLY, BLESS YE THE LORD. HEAR, O YE KINGS; GIVE EAR, O YE PRINCES; I, EVEN I, WILL SING UNTO THE LORD; I WILL SING PRAISE TO THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL.—*Judges* v. 1-3.

IN the Old Testament lessons for this Sunday, we have had brought under our notice one of the most remarkable pieces of primitive Hebrew literature which the Old Testament contains. It is generally held by scholars that the Song of Deborah is the work of a contemporary, probably the prophetess herself. It is, we are told, in all probability, the oldest fragment preserved to us in the Hebrew Scriptures. As such, it possesses exceptional value as indicating the character of Hebrew religion at a very early stage of the national history.

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the first Sunday after Trinity, June 21, 1903, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



I propose to ask you this morning to consider this composition as indicating the nature and process of that revelation of God which found its climax in the Mission of Jesus Christ, and also as throwing some light on the connected question as to the nature of the inspiration which is to be recognised in the Bible. The most casual reader cannot fail to be impressed by the religious enthusiasm and exaltation of this famous song. It takes high rank as poetry, but the prevailing temper is religious. The conception of God is thoroughly primitive; Jehovah has His home in Mount Seir, from whence He marches forth to battle. Israel is His people, and His union with them is so close that their interests and His are identical. Of course all this is quite normal. There is no real difference in religious standpoint, very little in religious expression, between Israel and Moab. "Israel looked to Jahweh, as the Moabites looked to Chemosh, for leadership in war, for decisions upon justice—including the detection of criminals and lost property and the settlement of questions of inheritance—and for direction as to the ritual of worship. They prayed to Him to let them see their desire on their enemies, ascribed their victories to His love for them, their defeats to His



anger, and they devoted to Him in slaughter their prisoners of war, and the animals they captured from their foes; all exactly as their Moabite neighbours are reported, in very much the same language, to have done to Chemosh the god of Moab.”<sup>1</sup> And as the religious standpoint is thus primitive and normal, so the morality of the Song is nowise superior to the general level of that rude age. The crafty stratagem by which Jael succeeded in murdering the fugitive Sisera is described as worthy of praise, and in the description there is a gloating cruelty which shocks us. The total absence of magnanimity in narrating the downfall of an enemy, however repugnant to us, is thoroughly normal. But while both religiously and ethically Israel thus stood on the same level as the kindred Semitic peoples, we know that there were forces present in Israel which, in the course of time, would secure for that nation the religious primacy of mankind; and, when we look more closely at the primitive record before us, we can, I think, discover in it traces of the presence of those exceptional elements. Two things at least arrest our notice. On the one hand, the God of Israel is no “God of

<sup>1</sup> G. A. Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 128.



the country," whose service has been accepted by the immigrant Israelites. They have brought their God with them from the wilderness, and whatever new attributes may be ascribed to Him under the influence of Canaanite worships, He remains inexorably distinct. On the other hand, the God of Israel is regarded by His people as the God who has manifested Himself at Sinai: "Lord, when Thou wentest forth out of Seir, when Thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens also dropped. Yea, the clouds dropped water, the mountains flowed down at the presence of the Lord, even yon Sinai, at the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel." There is no explicit mention of the Covenant by which Jehovah bound Israel to Himself, but the tone of devotional affection which pervades the Song proves that the Divine manifestation at Sinai was associated in the popular mind with Jehovah's goodness. History undoubtedly records the servitude of the nation in Egypt, and its deliverance by Moses under what was believed to be the direction of Jehovah. These facts lie behind the witness of the earliest prophets, whose writings have survived, and it is no excessive assumption that they also lie behind the earlier Song of Deborah. In the concluding



verse of the Song, Jehovah's people are called His lovers. "Let them that love Him be as the Sun when he goeth forth in his might." In view of the later history it is, I think, impossible not to recognise in the affectionate intimacy thus confessed between Israel and Jehovah something exceptional and significant. The national unity had from the first a religious basis, and this became apparent under the pressure of conflict. "The recognition of a common God was the rallying point of national feeling. Yahveh, as the God of all the Israelite tribes, was chiefly realized in war, for the battles of Israel were the battles of their God."<sup>1</sup> And this religious unity, realized in the crisis of national conflict, was strong enough to preserve the nation from the subtle, continuous, disintegrating influence exercised upon them by their Canaanite neighbours. "These dozen desert tribes, cursed with the incoherence of Semitic life, were brought together and kept together by their common trust in their Deity. When, after the settlement in Palestine, among the diverse opportunities which the broken geography of the land so remarkably affords, they were tempted to separate from their common interests upon widely

<sup>1</sup> Montefiore, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 56.



divergent lines of culture, it was, as the Book of Judges testifies, not by a return to the Law that they were united, but by the recollection of their debt to Jahweh. In Deborah's as in Gideon's case, memory was the nurse to faith, and the conviction of His unfaltering desire to help them rallied the people against their foreign tyrants. The opening verse of Deborah's Song gives us the whole secret of the national inspiration in a tribute of glory to Jahweh :

“For that the leaders took the lead in Israel,  
For that the people offered themselves willingly,  
Praise ye Jahweh.”<sup>1</sup>

The secret of Israel's religious distinctiveness lay, precisely, in the quality of their God, and this revealed itself very gradually through the agency of the prophets. At first there is little difference discernible between Chemosh and Jehovah ; but it is matter of fact that from the worship of Chemosh there proceeded no spiritual and ethical inspiration such as the Hebrew prophets derived from their worship of Jehovah ; and therefore, when we find that those prophets consistently assume that a covenant relationship of a definitely ethical character

<sup>1</sup> G. A. Smith, *Modern Criticism and Preaching of Old Testament*, p. 153.



had been created at the dawn of the national history between Israel and Jehovah through the instrumentality of Moses ; and when, further, we find that this assumption is the more confidently held as their own spiritual and ethical teachings reach a higher level ; when, finally, we see the long process of progressive prophetic doctrine reaching its true climax and receiving its weightiest sanction in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we feel ourselves confronted by a cogent, cumulative argument for the Religion which we profess, which is not only strong in itself, but is also properly unassailable from the sides of literary and historical criticism. And this also is to be said, that in the recognition of the historic fact, that the spiritual and ethical development, which proceeded within the national life of Israel, has been in its process and in its outcome unique, there is no proper necessity laid upon us, either to deny the existence of kindred religious developments elsewhere, or to assume that the process within Israel ought necessarily to be described as miraculous. The uniqueness of which we spoke consists in the remarkable continuity and the progressive character of the process, and above all in the supreme result to which in the Gospel it arrived. A great impression is said to have been made



recently in Germany by two lectures delivered by an eminent Assyriologist, Professor Friedrich Delitzsch, which have recently appeared in an attractive English edition. In a short preface to the second of those lectures the Professor, apparently standing on the defensive, expresses himself thus:—

“The more deeply I immerse myself in the spirit of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, the greater becomes my mistrust of Yahwè, who butchers the peoples with the sword of his insatiable anger; who has but one favourite child, while he consigns all other nations to darkness, shame, and ruin; who uttered these words to Abraham, ‘I will bless those who bless thee, and those who curse thee will I curse.’ I take refuge in Him Who, in life and death, taught, ‘Bless those who curse you’; and full of confidence and joy, and of earnest striving after moral perfection, put my trust in the God to Whom Jesus has taught us to pray—the God Who is a loving and righteous Father over all men on earth.”<sup>1</sup>

I do not know how far religious opinion in Germany may justify, or at least excuse, this kind of language, but I am sure that in itself it is both misleading and unhistorical. The God revealed to us in and through our Lord Jesus Christ stands to

<sup>1</sup> *Babel and Bible*, p. 149.



the God whom the prophetess Deborah praises in the famous Song before us, as the God of a thoughtful and cultivated Christian stands to the God of his childhood. From one point of view the God of the child is an absurd and intolerable Deity ; the child takes for granted in its prayers that He will lend Himself to the pettiest and least rational purposes, for the child can only think of God under the strict limitations of its undeveloped intellect and conscience, and its theology is necessarily puerile. "When I was a child," says St. Paul, "I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child ; now that I am become a man I have put away childish things." But the man, as he recalls his childish devotion, does neither despise nor repudiate it, for he knows that, though it was ignorant, it was also sincere, and that it formed the worthiest element in his early life, and made possible for him whatever attainment, moral and spiritual, he has since been able to reach. It is a very familiar and a very true comparison that is made between the human race and the individual man. Of mankind generally, as of individual men, the sacred writer's words hold true, that "God dealeth with them as with sons." The religious history of mankind is the record of a moral and spiritual education, beginning, as all education must



begin, with the simplest elements ; patient, as all education must be patient, of astonishing misunderstandings and perversions ; using, as all education must use, continuous and varying discipline ; and finding its justification, as all education must find its justification, in the results which it secures. The result of the spiritual education of Israel is the religion of the Incarnation : the Gospel of God made manifest in Jesus Christ ; and that result is the sufficient defence of all the disciplines and teachings which secured it. Those disciplines and teachings may be, and probably are, totally obsolete : they have served their turn ; they have fulfilled their task ; they may, and ought to, be discarded. It is a strange and foolish proceeding to tear them out of their historic context, and to criticise them as if they were standing elements of Christianity, perpetually binding on a world which has outgrown them. But nothing less than this is the impression conveyed by such language as that of the German scholar to whom I have referred. I admit, indeed, that Christian people have, in the past, given but too much cause for the misconception which such language implies. An irrational theory of Biblical inspiration has seemed to require that Christian men should, somehow or other, vindicate both the religion and



the morality of every part of the Scriptures. They have, naturally, found the greatest difficulty in justifying the eulogy which one whom they must hold to be, in the fullest sense of the term, an inspired prophetess, passed on an act which they cannot help regarding as a foul and treacherous murder. And they have had recourse to very violent exegetic and casuistic expedients in order to harmonize the requirements of their religious theory and the perceptions of their moral sense. "We need not follow these interpreters into the morasses of casuistry, into which an unhistorical idea of religion and revelation leads them. To justify the deed [of Jael] by the standards of Christian morality, it is necessary to lower those standards to the level of the deed." It would seem necessary, therefore, to correlate our doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture and our philosophy of religious history. Let me remind you that, although theories of this inspiration have, from time to time, received very general acceptance among Christian people, and although, perhaps, it may be true that a rigid doctrine of verbal inspiration has, throughout Christian history, mostly prevailed in the Church, yet, as a matter of fact, the Church has happily abstained from any authoritative pronouncement on the subject, and, therefore, we are free,



without the embarrassment of ecclesiastical decisions in the past, to consider the pressing and difficult question of Biblical inspiration. You will not expect me, at the end of a sermon, to speak at any length on a subject of that importance and difficulty ; but it is hardly possible altogether to avoid it when preaching on such a passage as that which has engaged our attention this morning, and you will readily believe that no subject is more frequently and more anxiously considered by a modern clergyman than this. Three inferences, at least, seem to be suggested by a careful and honest study of the narrative we have read from the Book of Judges as our first lesson this morning, and the Song which we shall read from the same source as our first lesson to-night.

In the first place, the obvious discrepancies between the record of the same events in the two accounts demonstrate that whatever else the inspiration of Scripture may involve, it does not necessarily or invariably imply accuracy in statements of fact. Thus, to give but a single example, Sisera is said in the one account to have been murdered while "in a deep sleep"; and in the other, as he was drinking milk from a bowl. There is, of course, nothing unusual in a discrepancy of that kind ; it is, rather, severely normal, and its appearance in the sacred



narrative shows that in the composition of that narrative the normal conditions of human testimony obtained. Critical scholars are at no loss to explain the discrepancies. They tell us that the account we have read this morning is later than the Song which we shall read to-night, and built up of various materials, including probably the Song itself to which it serves as an introduction. "There is no substantial reason to doubt that the basis of chapter iv. is an old prose story of Sisera, which, though not rivalling the Song of Deborah in antiquity, is not conspicuously inferior to the other stories in the book."<sup>1</sup>

In the next place, it is sufficiently obvious that the inspiration of these varying accounts did not imply any immunity from ordinary literary risks. We are assured, on high authority, that the present position of textual criticism, with respect to the Song of Deborah, is "one of baffled curiosity," and that the most reasonable explanation of the difficulty of intelligibly rendering the text is to assume that the text has reached us in a corrupt form.<sup>2</sup>

And, finally, when we consider in the light of the Christian Revelation the theology and the morals of

<sup>1</sup> *Judges*, ed. Moore, p. 110, "Int. Crit. Com."

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopædia Biblica*, ii. 2313.



these Scriptures, we cannot avoid the conclusion that whatever theory of Biblical inspiration we may in the end decide upon, it will have to admit that inspiration does not necessarily imply any escape from secular limitations of religious and ethical thought. The time has long passed in which Christian scholars would adduce a passage from the Song of Deborah as proving the malignant influence of the planets. "Sisera fought," said no less a divine than Jeremy Taylor, "when there was an evil aspect, or malignant influence of heaven upon him."<sup>1</sup>

And, if we no longer find in this primitive literature any support for the pertinacious folly of the astrologers, so we refuse to accept the revolting treachery of Jael as contributing any kind of justification for the cruel violence of Christian assassins. Deborah's benediction counts for nothing against the clear verdict of the conscience on treachery and on assassination. If you ask me, as you are certainly entitled to ask, what in my own belief constitutes the "inspiration" of such Scriptures as those, which the Church, in her wisdom, has appointed for our edification to-day, I confess to you that I do not see my way to a satisfactory answer. For myself, I am content to recognise a special

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, iii, 162, ed. Heber,



importance in the literature of Israel ; for I regard Israel as a nation truly inspired, and I seek the message of Israel's unique history in its literature, and I find that literature to be practically coextensive with the Old Testament. Beyond the recognition of that special importance I cannot advance any theory applicable to the literature as a whole. Certain parts of the Old Testament carry their own proof of inspiration in their unfailing power to arrest and hold the approval of the human conscience. The Bible, in Coleridge's phrase, "finds" us as no other book can, and our very confidence in the decision in its favour, which our own hearts invariably pronounce, when we are in presence of the distinctive witness of an Isaiah, or a Micah, or a Psalmist, compels us to yield no less deference to the inner repugnance provoked in us by the savage morality of the earlier records. The language of the Quaker Apologist seems to me equally just in itself, and, at the present time, worthy our recollection : "Though we do acknowledge the scriptures to be very heavenly and divine writings . . . yet we may not call them the principal fountain of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the first adequate rule of faith and manners ; because the principal fountain of truth must be the truth itself. . . . When we doubt of the streams of



any river or flood, we recur to the fountain itself ; and having found it, there we desist, we can go no farther, because there it springs out of the bowels of the earth, which are inscrutable. Even so the writings and sayings of all men we must bring to the word of God, I mean the eternal word, and if they agree hereunto, we stand there.”<sup>1</sup>

The old Quaker Apologist is making appeal against the degrading letter-worship of the Christian Church to that Divine Court within the human heart, where the Spirit of God Himself holds the seat of the Judge. Against the superstition of Christian literalism as against the grosser, but perhaps not less degrading, superstition of paganism, the security must be always this :—

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

<sup>1</sup> Barclay's *Apology*, p. 66.



## V

### ST. LUKE'S PROLOGUE—THE CHARTER OF CRITICISM<sup>1</sup>

FORASMUCH AS MANY HAVE TAKEN IN HAND TO DRAW UP A NARRATIVE CONCERNING THOSE MATTERS WHICH HAVE BEEN FULFILLED AMONG US, EVEN AS THEY DELIVERED THEM UNTO US, WHICH FROM THE BEGINNING WERE EYEWITNESSES AND MINISTERS OF THE WORD, IT SEEMED GOOD TO ME ALSO, HAVING TRACED THE COURSE OF ALL THINGS ACCURATELY FROM THE FIRST, TO WRITE UNTO THEE IN ORDER, MOST EXCELLENT THEOPHILUS, THAT THOU MIGHTEST KNOW THE CERTAINTY CONCERNING THE THINGS WHEREIN THOU WAST INSTRUCTED.—*St. Luke* i. 1-4.

TO-DAY the Church commemorates St. Luke the Evangelist, and I have therefore taken for my text the notable preface, with which, after the literary fashion of the classical historians of Greece, he introduces his narrative. At no time in the history of the Church, perhaps, has so much anxious interest gathered about the records of the Life of Christ. Of course the reason is both obvious and notorious. However Christians may state the essentials of their

<sup>1</sup> Preached on St. Luke's Day, October 18, 1903, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



religion, and appraise the relative importance of its constituent elements, yet all, in the last result, are brought back to the original character of Christianity as a discipleship to an historical Person, believed to be both Divinely commissioned and Himself, in sole and incommunicable sense, Divine. And all the knowledge we possess about that historical Person is contained in the New Testament, and pre-eminently in the four brief biographies which we call "the Gospels." Therefore it follows that the intellectual basis for the historical affirmations of the creeds must be provided by these writings. They stand towards the creeds as the volumes of evidence towards a Report. The one is valuable and authoritative, precisely in so far as it is a faithful summary and interpretation of the other. The creeds have no independent authority ; they add nothing to our knowledge about the Lord ; they help us only by officially stating what the New Testament contains, but the spiritual worth of the statement depends wholly on its fidelity to the documents. The principle of the 8th Anglican Article is thoroughly sound, though we all demur to the extent of its application. Moreover, it is now commonly known that the historical value of our Gospels has been seriously challenged both at home and abroad, and



I am very certain that there are few thoughtful and educated persons in such a congregation as this who, when they hear the sacred narratives read, are not conscious of an inward disquiet, almost misgiving, born of the fact, which has been forced on their attention by conversations, lectures, review-articles, and books, that those narratives have been closely examined and publicly doubted and denied. Of all men, the Christian preacher is necessarily the most mentally troubled of all; for he, unlike the rest, cannot put on one side the allegations of scepticism and unbelief; his own intellectual rectitude, which carries with it his right to teach at all, binds him to the anxious and difficult task of considering fairly what may be urged against the religion he stands for; and only so long as his public teaching is known to have behind it an honest and careful examination of objections, and a conviction, chastened perhaps and moderated in its expressions and applications, but not destroyed in the process, does it carry any weight with candid and honourable men. To-day, then, I shall take for granted that you all share with me an anxious interest in the records of the Life of Christ, as being the ultimate external sources of the creed which, as Christians, we possess.

Much unnecessary mental distress has, I think,



been occasioned to Christian people by the mistaken notions about the Gospels which dwell in their minds, and make them unreasonably suspicious of the methods and conclusions of Biblical critics. The assumption which underlies the work of the older Harmonists may serve as an illustration. A place—so it was thought—must be found at all hazards for every word uttered and every act done by Christ as recorded in four differing, though essentially allied, documents; and, accordingly, marvels of dovetailing and duplication were worked, and a complete harmony set before the Christian, which a sane and reasonable criticism shattered with ease. Perhaps the root of the mischief lay in a theory of inspiration, as securing immunity from mistake, which, though it never received the formal authentication of the Church, did certainly for many ages command the acceptance of all Christians, and, hardly less, in a theory of canonicity, which was supposed to give the certificate of an infallible Church to whatsoever was contained in the canonical documents. And these mistaken theories still exercise great influence upon many Christian people, so that they feel themselves religiously obliged to maintain the historical accuracy and theological truth of whatsoever is contained within the covers of the New Testament.



And therefore, when the accuracy is clearly disproved by the critics, and the theological truth is disallowed by the divines, they are greatly perplexed and troubled. Consequently, it would appear to be highly important that we should make sure that our expectations with respect to the New Testament are reasonable and legitimate, that we should not ask more from it than it professes to give, that we should not run the risk of denouncing the critics in an irrational panic. Now, perhaps, there is no passage in the whole Bible which is more serviceable for the correcting of what I shall take leave to call orthodox misapprehensions of the New Testament than this little Preface to the Third Gospel which I have read as my text ; for here we have an evangelist's own account of his method of work, and of his aim in working. To this most valuable statement, then, I ask your closest attention.

St. Luke (for you will allow me to give that name to the unnamed author of the Third Gospel and of the Acts) tells us that he was led to write a biography of Christ because such biographies were numerous, and he felt himself to have special qualifications for the task of writing. He puts himself in a large class of writers, none of whom had any first-hand acquaintance with the events which they recorded,



but all of whom depended for their information upon the tradition handed down from the Apostles. "This modest position claimed by the writer," it has been well said, "is evidence of his honesty. A forger would have claimed to be an eyewitness, and would have made no apology for writing."<sup>1</sup> Whether the tradition of the "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" was oral or written is not stated, but there is no improbability in the view that there were some written statements of apostolic teaching, such as Papias, in a well-known passage preserved by Eusebius, says that St. Mark wrote down from his recollection of St. Peter's preaching. Critical scholars, generally, agree that St. Luke took some of the written narratives, which he mentions, as his authorities in the composition of his own Gospel. Probably he had before him either the canonical Gospel of St. Mark, or a document which was substantially identical with it. Into this question we need not now enter. The point which concerns us is the plain statement of the Evangelist that his work was less an original composition than a compilation of existing materials, oral or written, or both. What has become of those earlier narratives which St. Luke found in circulation? They cannot

<sup>1</sup> Plummer, *St. Luke*, p. 2.



certainly be identified with the extant apocryphal gospels, for these are clearly the production of much later times, and, for the most part, seem to have no basis in history at all; and of the apocryphal gospels which have survived in a few quotations so little is known that nothing positive as to their character can be safely affirmed. We may agree, then, with Dr. Plummer that "all the documents alluded to by St. Luke were driven out of existence by the manifest superiority of the four canonical Gospels."

What, then, does St. Luke put forward as his own justification for adding yet another Gospel to those already existing? Does he plead any special inspiration, or any apostolic mandate, or even any ecclesiastical authority? Nothing of the kind; he modestly claims to have taken great pains in the task, and he suggests, though he does not actually say, that he had enjoyed exceptional opportunities for learning the facts which were to be related. We may further infer, not a censure on the existing narratives as untrue or heretical, but an opinion to the effect that they were defective in range, accuracy, and order of events. St. Luke designs to start at the beginning, to get his materials into a scheme whether of chronological succession or of dramatic



propriety, and to carry his record to the end, and so he will do completely what his predecessors in the work have done partially. There is not a syllable in his statement which moves his literary method away from the natural plane. If extraordinary treatment ought to be given to the documents of the New Testament, if we ought to set a hedge of protective reserve about them, and insist on their being exempted from the free and frank application of those principles of literary and historical science which we necessarily accept as the true instruments of extracting historical testimony, then the justification of all this must be sought elsewhere than in the only deliberate and formal declaration as to the methods of composition adopted by the evangelists which the New Testament contains. There is nothing supernatural, nothing even abnormal, about an evangelist's work as sketched in this preface of St. Luke: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know



the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."

"This prologue," observes Dr. Plummer, the author of the most scholarly and thorough of English commentaries on St. Luke, "contains all that we really *know* respecting the composition of early narratives of the life of Christ, and it is the test by which theories as to the origin of our Gospels must be judged. No hypothesis is likely to be right which does not harmonize with what is told us here. Moreover, it shows that an inspired writer felt that he was bound to use research and care in order to secure accuracy."

When, therefore, we are confronted with demonstrations, or what seem to us demonstrations, of defective knowledge, or misconception of facts, or contemporary opinions now known to be erroneous, or even mental bias in the Gospels, we need not be either surprised or distressed. If the evangelists worked under frankly normal conditions—and St. Luke's prologue plainly authorises us to affirm that they did—then we could hardly expect the absence from their work of the invariable characteristics of human composition; and the faults I have named—defective knowledge, misconception of facts, prevailing contemporary errors, mental bias—are precisely



such. It is suggestive that St. Luke's straightforward account of his work was found displeasing to many early Christians, as we may infer from the fact that to his simple statement, "it seemed good to me also," was added in some Latin MSS., with manifest irrelevance but clear intention, the words *et spiritui sancto*. On the other hand, the interesting fragment on the New Testament, known as the Muratorian Canon, and dating from about the year 200 A.D., faithfully reproduces the statement of the Prologue in its brief account of St. Luke's Gospel. The fragment reads thus :—

"The third book of the Gospel, that according to Luke, was compiled in his own name in order by Luke the physician, when after Christ's ascension Paul had taken him to be with him like a student of law. Yet neither did he see the Lord in the flesh ; and he too, as he was able to ascertain events, so set them down. So he began his story from the birth of John."

And what was the purpose which St. Luke had in view as he wrote? He says that he writes in order that Theophilus may "fully know the certainty concerning the words wherein he had been instructed." As early as the time of Origen many held the view that Theophilus (like Bishop



Ken's well-known Philotheus) was a symbolic title of the true disciple ; but this is improbable. Theophilus, we may be sure, was a definite person, and held a position of importance in society. He was a Greek, and, as the complimentary address *κράτιστε*, "most excellent," seems to indicate, belonged to the equestrian order. We may picture him to ourselves as a thoughtful, educated man, who had accepted Christianity because the broad simple facts, which constituted the apostolic message, struck home to his conscience, and drew him to discipleship. He had been instructed, "catechised," as part of his preparation for baptism, and now, the first enthusiasm of conversion over and his creed before him, a hundred questions pressing on him from his pagan acquaintances and stirring in his own mind, he feels the need of a completer knowledge of that Person whose Life, Death, and Resurrection were, he believed, the saving of mankind. St. Paul's preaching had sufficed for conversion—it is nowise improbable that Theophilus was one of the apostle's converts—but now he needed the details which should fill in the bold outlines of the Gospel; and he betook himself to his friend and fellow-countryman, "the beloved physician," who, better than the great Missionary and Theologian, would understand and



satisfy his needs. Thus St. Luke came to write a catholic version of the Gospel. Bishop Westcott discerned in the fact that the Evangelist was also the author of the Book of the Acts, evidence of "a mind in which the future of Christianity was more distinctly imaged even than in the visions of St. John."<sup>1</sup> St. Luke had an intuitive perception of the elements in the mingled mass of more or less authentic traditions which lay before him, written and unwritten, and which represented in their totality the impression made on His own generation by the Son of Man, which would appeal to the heart and conscience of mankind in the ages to come. It is in truth St. Luke's version of the Life of Christ which has entered most deeply into the world's life, and stirred most powerfully the imagination of ordinary men. Dante has divined the secret of the unique catholicity of this Gospel, when he calls St. Luke "the writer of the story of the gentleness of Christ," *scriba mansuetudinis Christi*.<sup>2</sup> And it is precisely here that we find our justification for believing that the patient and laborious Evangelist, as with heart aflame with love for the Master, whose historic portrait he aspired to paint, he worked at

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to Study of Gospels*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Plummer, p. xlii., from the *De Monarchia*.



his sacred task, had with him, in modes and measures that he knew not, and we cannot know, the helping power of a true inspiration. The credentials of St. Luke's Gospel are found where no assaults of a hostile, and therefore unsound, criticism can touch them, where no corrections of a just and frank yet sympathetic study can do other than strengthen them—in the hearts and lives of Christian men. In his charming romance, *Callista*, Cardinal Newman describes the conversion of the perplexed Greek girl, thrown into prison and menaced with extreme peril, as caused by the reading of St. Luke's Gospel. 'She read a few paragraphs and became interested, and in no long time she was absorbed in the volume. When she had once taken it up, she did not lay it down. Even at other times she would have prized it, but now, when she was so desolate and lonely, it was simply a gift from an unseen world. It opened a view of a new state and community of beings, which only seemed too beautiful to be possible. But not into a new state of things alone, but into the presence of One, who was simply distinct and removed from anything that she had, in her most imaginative moments, ever depicted to her mind as ideal perfection. Here was that to which her

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intellect tended, though that intellect could not frame it. It could approve and acknowledge, when set before it, what it could not originate. Here was He who spoke to her in her conscience: whose Voice she heard, whose Person she was seeking for. . . . That image sank deep into her: she felt it to be a reality. She said to herself, "This is no poet's dream; it is the delineation of a real individual. There is too much truth and nature, and life and exactness about it, to be anything else."<sup>1</sup> These words to my mind carry a truth which critical students of the Gospel, absorbed in the close study of details, may but too easily let slip. They may miss the Divine Portrait of the Saviour of the World as they examine the frame and discuss the artist's technique. But it is the Divine Portrait which holds the gaze of tired and despairing eyes, which as they gaze catch the light of its love and hope, and kindle again with faith and purpose. In front of that Portrait of the Son of Man, what shall we say? With the doubts and denials of our time pressing in on us, what shall we determine?

*Credo quia impossibile.* "Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief."

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 325-26.



## VI

### THE OPEN MIND<sup>1</sup>

NOW THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, WHETHER THESE THINGS WERE SO.—*Acts xvii. 11.*

IT has become a customary manner of speaking among us to associate together religious zeal and intellectual narrowness, enthusiasm and bigotry, a keen interest in theology and a fanatical refusal to pay attention to new ideas, however in themselves reasonable and attractive. Nor may it be doubted that our habit of speech in this particular is justified by a great mass of human experience, accumulated through many ages in many lands. And certainly it cannot be denied that in this present time religious zeal, interest, and enthusiasm are more often than not accompanied by narrowness, lack of intellectual sympathy, and bigotry. We may add that there

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the fifth Sunday after Trinity, July 12, 1903, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



are obvious reasons why this should be the case. Theological beliefs are something more than opinions, however confidently held. They enter into the inner shrine of the conscience and unite themselves with the intimate loyalties of the heart. They wield authority over action, and fashion for themselves a suitable framework of accustomed procedure, giving colour and direction to the life which has been insensibly surrendered to their control. Most of all is this the case when the beliefs in question repose on a Divine Revelation. The natural reluctance to discuss or even abandon positions which have come to be the substructures of life is reinforced by the apprehensions of piety. It is taken for granted that God has spoken ; and the line is drawn with hesitation, if drawn at all, between revelation itself and human apprehensions of it. Yet it might have been thought that, however natural this confusion may be, human experience, melancholy and monotonous, might have corrected it by the demonstration, many times repeated under many circumstances, of the error of human opinions, the best established in the world. It hardly needs to make appeal to history ; the experience of individual men will suffice to prove as much as this. Let any man who has reached, I do not say old age, but middle life, look back on



his own career and call back to his mind the beliefs which he held once and holds no more, and he will need no further argument to disprove the exclusive and final claims advanced by his present convictions.

Of all men, the Jew in the time of St. Paul was least accessible to new religious notions. His ancestral religion reposed, as he believed, on a Divine Revelation ; it was buttressed in his mind by all the subtle converging sentiments of national pride and racial superiority. He was a religious aristocrat, the favourite of heaven, and his creed drew to its support both the enthusiasm of patriotism and the selfishness of privilege. We cannot wonder that the Gospel of religious equality seemed wonderfully unconvincing to the Jews ; that, for the most part, the apostolic preaching moved them to contempt and indignation ; that they, far more than their heathen contemporaries, were moved to the baleful activity of persecution. The chapter from the Acts, which we have read as our second lesson this morning, contains a sad but thoroughly representative record of Jewish fanaticism. The sacred historian has to note one illustrious exception to the general rule. The men of Berea did not reveal the common bigotry ; they were willing to listen,



ready to examine, even open to conviction. "Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so." The laudatory adjective of the historian is worth noting. The Berœans, he says, were *εὐγενέστεροι*, more noble, or, to render the Greek word more accurately, better bred, more gentlemanly in their behaviour, than the Thessalonians, and they showed the fact by the courteous audience which they gave to St. Paul, and by their willingness to be at the pains to look carefully into the matters he had brought before them. Berœa, we are told, was a city of some antiquity, and "no doubt prided itself on the pure blood of its citizens." It stood in obvious contrast with "the noisy democracy of Thessalonica." If I may without offence suggest a modern parallel, it stood towards its flourishing neighbour as Boston stands to-day towards New York. No doubt a society of leisured and prosperous people, among whom there is a tradition of culture and a habit of discussion, is very favourable to tolerant views. A busy mercantile community is impatient of discussion, and asks for nothing more than a working system of religion; its interest is stimulated by the



competition of business and bound to the pursuit of commercial success, which means, of course, the acquisition of wealth. The circumstances of the Bereans were more kindly to the open mind than those of Thessalonica, and though even in Berea there was a multitude of ignorant people, which the Jews could "stir up" and "trouble," yet we may reasonably suppose that there were not in it, at least in any great number, that promiscuous mob from which the persecutors of Thessalonica drew those "vile fellows of the rabble" who "set the city on an uproar." But, when all is said, the superiority of the Bereans was not merely in their breeding and in their circumstances; they evidently were persons accustomed to use their minds in the matter of their religion, and, sufficiently convinced of the gravity of religion, to be ready to take some trouble about it. It is in these respects that the sacred historian certifies their nobility. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so."

I propose to you that the "nobility" of the Bereans is worthy our emulation. Look at the matter a little more closely. The root of bigotry is very often to be found in mental indolence. I do



not say, you will observe, ignorance, but mental indolence, and although, more often than not, these are combined, they are by no means so combined universally, nor is there any necessary connection between them. Ignorance may often be a misfortune; mental indolence is invariably a vice. I am sure it is possible to amass great stores of information (I will not use the word knowledge) without any real mental activity; and that this is no rare phenomenon may, perhaps, be shown by the familiar association in the public mind of "academic" with what is impracticable and even unintelligent; and, certainly, the converse is true. Unavoidable ignorance is compatible not only with natural candour, but also with great and fruitful activity of mind. An intelligent artisan—an engine-driver—once said to me by way of protest against a sermon of a noisy shallow type, but too common among us, and defended as necessary for the poor, "You know, sir, we working men can understand much more than we can say"; by which I supposed him to mean that, in spite of inevitable deficiency of information, and inability to express their thoughts lucidly, these artisans were wont to use their minds with respect to what they heard, and thus had become able to distinguish between a rational



argument and the rhodomontade of what is called "popular" preaching. I am sure that in the classes above that to which my thoughtful artisan belonged, there are very many with reference to whom it would hardly be untrue to affirm the precise opposite of his statement, "They can say much more than they can understand." Bred up from the cradle in a society of talkers, accustomed to hear talking, good, bad, or indifferent, on every kind of subject, never at the pains to study, never in the mind to think, how many of us are in the habit of talking glibly and effectively about subjects of which we hardly know the elements, and the very facility of our speaking cheats us into forgetting our ignorance. Our minds are idle, while our tongues are active. "We can say much more than we can understand." Most of all is this unfortunate when the subject under treatment is connected with Religion. Here, before everything else, the alert, exercised, discriminating mind is necessary if we are to escape the opposite perils of an irrational scepticism and a not less irrational credulity. Believe me, the acquisition of this "readiness of mind" cannot be a sudden or rapid achievement. The occasions which will demand its exercise and approve its value come upon us without notice, and



often in the most unexpected circumstances. "The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." The readiness of mind which preserves us from that incapacity to recognise and that reluctance to acknowledge new truth, which are the conditions of the most fatal apostasy, must be the consequence and reward of mental vigilance sustained as a habit. "Prove all things," says St. Paul; "hold fast that which is good; abstain from every form of evil."

The mental alertness of the Bereans was united with a worthy sense of the gravity of Religion. They held it to be their duty to take trouble in making up their minds. They would not give an immediate acceptance to the Gospel; they recognised at once its immense importance, and applied themselves to its careful consideration. St. Paul declared that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of Israel, and, in proof of his assertion, he appealed to the Scriptures; therefore to the Scriptures the Bereans betook themselves, "examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so."

There is among us a kind of religious tolerance which argues an utterly inadequate sense of the gravity of Religion. Of religious discussions, too often, the prevailing note is really irreligious. All



things are dragged down to the common level of free debate, and men cast aside their beliefs with the facility with which, in the idle conversations of society, they shift their positions. In short, they make everything matter of opinion, and shake from them the manly yoke of conviction. Now, Religion cannot be matter of opinion, but of conviction; and, if you ask me in brief to point the distinction between the two, I will say that conviction includes a moral element which is absent from opinion. Not alone the intellect is concerned, but the conscience also. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness," says the Apostle, and we understand him. Belief that can dictate motives and order action must have drawn to itself the affections and enthusiasms of the heart. Religion has pre-suppositions of its own which can only be abandoned at the cost of Religion itself. "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." These solemn pre-suppositions of all Religion—that God really exists, and that He is in moral relationship with ourselves—prohibit the levity which can discuss religious questions without reverence, and abandon religious beliefs without caution and with-



out pain. The best evidence of religious gravity that we have it in our power to offer is, I suppose, this which the Berœans are said to have offered. We must be willing to take trouble to inquire, to examine the facts, to cleanse our minds of all conscious prejudice, and so to exercise responsibly our private judgment. There is a famous scene in Puritan history which illustrates, better than any words of mine, what I apprehend ought to be the Christian attitude of mind towards new views of religious truth. When the "Pilgrim Fathers" of Puritanism were about to set sail for America, there to lay the foundations of that great Republic which is so closely united with ourselves in sentiment and interest, it is said that John Robinson, whom a numerous Christian Church now reveres as "the father of the Independents," addressed to them the following remarkable speech:—

"Brethren, we are now quickly to part from one another, and whether I may ever live to see your faces on earth any more, the God of heaven only knows: but whether the Lord has appointed that or no, I charge you before God and His blessed angels, that you follow me no farther than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveal anything to you, by any other instrument of His, be



as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry: for I am verily persuaded, the Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of His holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go at present no farther than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented, for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God, but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace farther light as that which they first received.”<sup>1</sup>

These words of the Puritan teacher, spoken as long ago as 1620, are instinct with the nobility which distinguished the Berœans. And surely, in this present age, when from so many sides, and by such various instruments, Almighty God is pouring on us the light of new knowledge, it is this temper of mind which we should most earnestly desire and

<sup>1</sup> Neal's *Puritans*, i. 476-77.



most carefully cherish. To have an open mind in the Christian sense is to have a mind to which unaccustomed truth is welcome, not because we have never really known anything, and are therefore unable to understand the gravity of intellectual judgment, but because we venerate truth for its own sake, and have learned in the school of experience that our only hope of holding any truth is to be accessible to the appeal of all truth, and that we do violence to the distinctive principle of the Christian Religion when we admit to our minds the timorous and irrational supposition that as Christians we can have any separate interest from that of honest and reverent seekers after truth. Christ, the Truth Incarnate, commissions all genuine scientific investigation, and gathers into His message all the sound conclusions to which it leads ; and Christians are, in a world enslaved by prejudice, ignorance, and the servitude of unrighteousness, as men enfranchised and illuminated. "With freedom did Christ set us free," cries the apostle ; "stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage." We may not, nay, we cannot, be able to correlate all the separate testimonies of truth which claim our acceptance ; but we may not reject any, and, for the rest, we make an act of faith in the Truth Incarnate, and



rest in hope. The end is not yet. "For now we see in a mirror darkly ; but then face to face : now we know in part ; but then shall we know even as also we have been known."

On the earth the broken arcs : in the heaven a perfect round.



## VII

### HONOUR IN TIMES OF RELIGIOUS TRANSITION<sup>1</sup>

TAKE THOUGHT FOR THINGS HONOURABLE IN THE SIGHT OF  
ALL MEN.—*Romans* xii. 17.

THERE are reasons for thinking that St. Paul was, by some of his contemporaries, regarded as personally dishonourable. They accused him of a tendency to dishonest compromise in matters of doctrine, of a disposition towards unworthy compliance in matters of practice, of personal ambition readily served by a men-pleasing habit, even of a base covetousness of sordid gain. All these suggestions of dishonourable conduct seem to underlie the careful, or vehement, or exculpatory, or indignant language of the apostle in his extant letters. He explains to the Corinthians his strangely suspicious versatility. "I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the third Sunday after Epiphany, January 24, 1904, in the Temple.



some." He defends his attitude of tolerance towards the scrupulous "weaker brethren" in Rome and Corinth, and his attitude of intolerance towards the ascetics of Colossae, and the Judaizing ritualists of Galatia. He takes pains to make clear the precautions against dishonesty which he has taken in the matter of the great collection for the Hebrew Christians; he resents and, with some warmth, repudiates the suggestion that he trims his gospel to meet the wishes of his hearers, and occasionally, as in the second epistle to the Corinthians and in the epistle to the Philippians, he is carried by his emotion into eloquent and impassioned apology. Indeed, St. Paul was wont to pour into his teaching such genuine personal conviction, to identify so completely himself and his message, to associate himself so closely with his converts, that the imputation of dishonourable conduct gave him acute pain. "Am I now persuading men or God?" he cries, "or am I seeking to please men? if I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ."

The very largeness of the apostle's heart and the singular honesty of his character would, in any case, have exposed him to the suspicions and misconstructions of lesser men; but, perhaps, even more risk of popular mistake arose from the nature of his task

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and the conditions of his life. St. Paul was the providential instrument for effecting the transition of Christianity from the particularist legalism of that older Jewish system, out of which historically it grew, into the universalism of that Catholic Religion which we ourselves profess. In his own person that transition had been dramatically illustrated. The "wonderful conversion," which to-morrow will be commemorated in the churches, was a parable and a prophecy of the change which was passing upon Christ's Religion at the time, and, not less, of other changes which, in other transitional times yet hidden in the womb of futurity, would come upon it. St. Paul stood before his countrymen as an illustrious pervert, one who had changed his spiritual allegiance at no ordinary time, but in the very mid-course of a desperate conflict, one who had changed the fortunes of the day by his well-chosen desertion, and had taken his place at once as by an unquestionable right at the head of the enemy's host. He was "the Lost Leader" of Judaism, and had to carry the great burden of bitter misconstruction which belongs to the character. In the Christian camp the converted Pharisee necessarily was exposed to much suspicion; and when there also he began to display the same qualities of



disinterested enthusiasm and an almost reckless sincerity which had originally induced his breach with ancestral Judaism, he waked against himself resentments scarcely less deep and opposition scarcely less strenuous. For, indeed, that "wonderful conversion" implied not merely the definite success of Christianity in its rivalry with the older system, but also the not less important, nay, incomparably more important, triumph of Christian principles within Christianity itself. St. Paul entered at his baptism a Jewish sect; he added the lustre of his martyrdom to a Catholic Church; and the immense transition implied in those contrasted descriptions may give the measure of the greatness of the man, and of his work.

Times of transition are always fruitful of accusations of dishonesty. Thought is restless and incoherent, and language, reflecting thought, is ambiguous and obscure. The historic institutions remain, but the ideas which they originally expressed have become confused, or have wholly vanished. The inherited formularies of faith and worship linger on men's lips and are echoed in their sanctuaries, but the old convictions which they were framed to carry are losing their hold on the minds of the worshippers, and the traditional worship proceeds



in an atmosphere of vague dismay. This general dissolution represents one aspect of the transition ; but *ex vi termini* there is another. Much is passing away ; there is pain, fear, even—let us admit it—loss in the process ; but much is coming on to the scene, and—unless the record of history be wholly mendacious—what is coming compensates, and more than compensates, for what has passed. But, manifestly, the loss is obvious, immediate, urgent ; the gain is hidden, remote, as yet unperceived ; and, therefore, the Men of Transition are necessarily and invariably exposed to the suspicions of the ignorant, the clamours of the timorous, and the deep hostility of the fanatical. Men of transition are men of faith ; and, therefore, the justifications of their character and the key to their conduct are commonly hidden from men of sense. If, by an effort of historic imagination, we transfer ourselves to the first century, and from the standpoint of the Jewish-Christian society consider the doctrine and procedure of St. Paul, we shall be at no loss to understand the venomous suspicions with which he was regarded.

Thus the admonition of the text takes new interest from the character and circumstances of its author. "Take thought for things honourable in



the sight of all men." St. Paul, after his manner, is adapting a passage from the Book of Proverbs, which he read in the Septuagint version. In writing to the Corinthians about the business of sending to Jerusalem the money collected from the Gentile Churches, he quotes the same passage, from which, perhaps, we may infer that it was often on his lips—one of his characteristic sayings in fact: "avoiding this (he says), that any man should blame us in the matter of this bounty which is ministered by us: for we take thought for things honourable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." In writing to the Roman Christians, whom he did not personally know, the apostle would appear to be mainly concerned with the impression their behaviour was likely to make on the society of the Capital, to which he believed that his course was being providentially guided. He speaks as a pastor, concerned for the souls he is charged with; as a statesman, taking thought for the welfare of the Church, whose political direction is in his hands. Christian charity, he says, requires of Christ's disciples this consideration for others, who may be drawn to the faith, or wholly alienated from it, by the example of practical Christianity offered to them in the Church. The



admonition of the text is part of a connected series of counsels, all relating to Christian behaviour towards non-Christians. "Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honourable in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, be at peace with all men." It was no mere calculation of religious advantage that led St. Paul to emphasise so vigilant a regard for the general opinion ; rather he was following out to its logical consequence his characteristic conception of Christianity. To his mind, the Christian religion embraced all truth, spiritual, intellectual, moral ; and, accordingly, satisfactory Christian conduct evoked the approbation of the human conscience ; there was something strange and suspicious in any breach between Christian behaviour and the approval of good men. The lives of Christians were, indeed, the normal witnesses of their faith, and if, by lack of caution or by lack of fidelity, those lives failed to exhibit their true inspiring principle, there was grave injury inflicted on non-Christian observers. "Let not then your good be evil spoken of," he says, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that herein serveth Christ is well-pleasing to God, and approved of men."



It may be thought that this view of Christianity, as naturally certifying its Divine authority by the moral excellence which it enabled its professors to exhibit, was reasonable at a time when the moral inferiority of non-Christian society was so manifest that it could be assumed by the advocates of Christianity without risk of contradiction ; but that now, when it would be difficult, if not impossible, to justify that assumption, such a view has lost its reasonableness. Certainly, we must admit that between the professed and professional Christians of the present age and their avowedly non-Christian contemporaries there is, within the confines of Christendom, no such marked distinction in point of morality as was the case among the ancients. The fact is, perhaps, capable of explanation on grounds which do not properly imply any discredit to Christianity. We are permitted to maintain that the moral superiority of Christ's Religion has appealed so successfully to the general conscience, that no serious rival has been able to sustain itself in human regard where once the Morality of the Gospel has been effectively exhibited. It is not to be questioned that the principles of conduct, illustrated in the Life of Christ, and applied by apostolic wisdom to the control of social behaviour in the epistles, are



accepted and acted upon, more or less deliberately, by multitudes within modern Christendom, who would repudiate for themselves the name and character of believers; and we need not be surprised that this should be the case, for, at the beginning, the Divine Founder set in the forefront of His teaching this function of the Church as a nucleus or centre of salutary influence, having its effect on human society silently and, so to speak, indirectly, as "salt" and "leaven" may be conceived of as working. Therefore, the Pauline notion of Christianity as able to command, by natural right, the homage of the general conscience, seems to me unaffected by the fact that, thanks to its own historic successes, the claim of Christ's Religion no longer stands out in the same luminous prominence as heretofore. Whether under the description of Christianity, or under any other description, it remains the case that the morality historically originated by the Gospel, and carried to the acceptance of Christendom by the force of Christian examples, renewed continuously through the ages, and still apparent among us, satisfies, and alone satisfies, the general conscience to which it is proposed. The Christian Church can still face human society with the appeal of the great Apostle, can



still charter as its advocates before the reason and conscience of civilised men all the actions and aspirations which they themselves perform acknowledge as most deeply and nobly humane. Be men, is still the Christian claim on us; live on the highest levels of manhood, and you will discover yourselves to be Christians. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

But, perhaps, the thought may occur to some minds that, at this present time, the situation in which official Christianity stands is even worse than that which we have been discussing. St. Paul's exhortation, it may be said, must make the ears of every Anglican clergyman tingle, and send a blush into his face, as he recalls the discrepancies between his formal pledges and his actual convictions. "Take thought for things honourable in the sight of all men," says the Apostle, but he does not say that, even so, all men will admit the honourableness of the things we do. St. Paul himself, whom we can see to have been the perfect model of Christian honour, had to bear throughout his ministerial course



heavy and hurtful accusations ; and we need not, therefore, be too much depressed if our contemporaries also (no whit juster, or more charitable, or less prejudiced than his) make similar imputations. We, like St. Paul, are living in a transitional time, and we cannot escape from its distinctive difficulties. We are not responsible for them, but for the manner in which we handle, and the spirit in which we face them. Behind us are the many ages of Christian history, bringing to our guidance a great accumulation of religious experience, and we can find there the sufficient justification of our resolute refusal to desert the Church of our Fathers at the bidding of the least thoughtful and sympathetic of its members. Our belief in Christianity is far too deeply rooted to permit of such hasty desertion. We know enough of the past not to despair of the present ; we know enough of the present not to repudiate the past. We say, with that great teacher of our own time and race, Phillips Brooks, "that any dangers which the Church might have to encounter by making conscience and free inquiry her guides, even with the possibility of error, are alive and hopeful in comparison with the dead and hopeless dangers of a church which, under the strong power of authority, commits itself to a half-developed, a half-recorded,



and a half-understood past.”<sup>1</sup> We make our appeal to reasonable and charitable men. “Changes have passed upon current belief”: we grant it; “those changes ought to be recognised in current statements of belief”: we grant it. “You who are the official teachers of Christianity are honourably bound to effect that recognition”: again we grant it. So far we are all agreed; and I trust also that we are agreed that where belief and statements of belief are concerned, there is no essential distinction to be drawn between clergy and laity. When subscription to the Creeds is in debate, there is properly no question of the legal obligations of clerical office. The specific legal obligation with respect to doctrine imposed by Ordination concerns the Bible, not the Creeds; and with respect to the Bible the courts and the public conscience have effected what, with respect to the Articles, was effected by the Legislature more than a generation ago, viz. secured a liberal and sufficient latitude. The official obligation to accept the practical system of the National Church in fulfilling the pastoral function inflicts no burden on the conscience of any right-minded clergyman. Its reasonableness is self-evident. When, however, we come to the deeper matters of belief, not the clergy

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ii. 487.



as such, but the whole body of English Churchmen is concerned. The Apostles' Creed is that on the profession of which we were all baptized ; the Nicene Creed is that on the profession of which we are all communicants. The so-called Athanasian Creed is bound upon the congregations in a specially stringent way. None of these Creeds enters into the Ordinal as such ; they rest on the ordained clergy precisely with the same measure of spiritual authority as that which they impose on the religious laity. To say all this is to have gone some way towards an argument for slowness and caution in pressing the precise language of the Creeds.

"This is the beauty and value of our Church's Creed," wrote Phillips Brooks. "We all believe it, and no two thinking men hold it alike. It is as various as their various personalities with which it has entered into union."<sup>1</sup> You have a right to ask of us, who hold clerical office, the utmost frankness, consistent with that reasonable consideration which must determine the actual process of all teaching, and, most of all, religious teaching ; you have a right to ask of us a sustained effort to minimise the elements of error, obsolescence, and unreality in the formularies of faith and worship, which assuredly

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ii. 513.



will always in some measure be present in them ; you have a right to insist that we shall be steadily true to the ideal of that complete sincerity of thought and word which is offered to us in the Gospel ; but you have no right to throw upon us a responsibility which is also yours, and to fasten a charge of dishonourable evasion on us which, if it have any validity, belongs equally to yourselves. Surely in times of transition we all ought to be extremely slow to prefer against any the charge of dishonourableness ; we ought to remember that, more often than not, apparent inconsistency is an evidence of a more than commonly scrupulous conscience ; we ought to dread beyond all things the too facile injustice of coercing submission by wounding honour. And the while we are thus vigilant against the familiar sins of bigotry, let us be sternly honest with ourselves ; let us exalt sincerity as the very temper of Christ's Religion, and seek the test of religious sincerity, not in a severe and irrational allegiance to archaic formularies which can but work out in a hollow and pedantic literalism, but in the tone of the character and the normal habit of the life. If sincerity be inwoven into the texture of character, and have become the governing motive of conduct, we have the only assurance worth having that in



the lower region of ecclesiastical and political procedure, where formularies are fashioned, used, and revised, expediency will not be allowed to endanger principle; and for the rest we must remember St. Paul's warning. "Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be made to stand: for the Lord hath power to make him stand."



## II







## VIII

### MAN'S THIRST FOR GOD<sup>1</sup>

THE FOOL HATH SAID IN HIS HEART, THERE IS NO GOD.—  
*Psalm* xiv. 1.

AS THE HART PANTETH AFTER THE WATER BROOKS, SO  
PANTETH MY SOUL AFTER THEE, O GOD. MY SOUL THIRSTETH  
FOR GOD, FOR THE LIVING GOD: WHEN SHALL I COME AND  
APPEAR BEFORE GOD?—*Psalm* xlii. 1, 2.

ON Trinity Sunday we must think about God, for Trinity Sunday is the Festival of Revelation, and the subject of Revelation is God. Perhaps in our time there are reasons why a certain impatience should manifest itself when that subject is proposed. We are for ever being reminded that we are the children of an age which is aflame with the passion of scientific research; and the fact is expressed pre-eminently in two features of modern society. On the one hand, we are immensely interested in the

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Trinity Sunday, June 7, 1903, in the Nave of Westminster Abbey, from the wooden pulpit said to have been used by Archbishop Cranmer at the Coronation of Edward VI., and now again brought into use.



physical universe. The long train of the sciences holds us continuously to the study of Nature, by which we mean the whole sum of phenomena, "the things which are seen." We venerate Science for very cogent reasons. From Science we have received great gifts, so great that it seems irrational to doubt that in its treasury even the greatest are held in reserve to recompense the search of honest, patient seekers. Science, indeed, seems to hold among us the place of a new Religion. Here are all the familiar tokens and consequences of ardent faith—zeal, sacrifice, immense courage, passionate conviction, and, not less, the shadows of all these, intolerance, vanity, fanaticism. If I desired to find a parallel to the position ascribed to the leaders of physical science among ourselves, I should have to go back to the most theological of all epochs, the very age of the Reformation. As then men quoted with awe and appealed with submission to the Pontiffs of Protestant dogma—Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Bucer, Beza, and their contemporaries, so now they defer to the Popes of physical science—Darwin, or Pasteur, or Huxley, or Kelvin. The stream of general interest then ran in theological channels; it has now, to all appearance, shifted its course, and is running in the new bed of naturalism.



In a word, we are all secularists now, not so much because we have faced the supreme question of Religion, and deliberately pronounced upon it the answer of unbelief, but rather because we are overwhelmed, and our minds in some sense swamped by the mass and variety of the information which Science pours upon us. On the other hand, Science has developed in its true votaries a temper of intellectual caution, which disinclines them to make, or to accept, affirmations beyond such evidence as they can appraise and test. It is deeply significant that the characteristic modern notion of "Agnosticism" has emerged from the camp of Science. Now both these prevailing tempers—the temper of secularism and the temper of agnosticism, intellectual absorption and intellectual modesty—indispose us for the thought about God to which on Trinity Sunday we are called. In vulgar minds, undisciplined by genuine mental effort, unilluminated by any adequate scientific knowledge, in some cases, at least, biassed by the disastrous prejudice of unworthy living, these tempers induce the bold hypothesis, as arrogant as it is unproved, of atheism. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." It hardly needs saying that that declaration is as little scientific as it is religious. The true man of



Science has learned the limitations of his knowledge, and gained view, however distant, of the measureless, untraversed continents of truth. Under the floor yonder lies the dust of one whom all men venerate as a Prince of Science. "I do not know what I may appear to the world," were Sir Isaac Newton's words shortly before his death, "but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." Parted from Sir Isaac Newton's grave by but a few yards lie the mortal remains of another student of Nature, whose name is hardly less famous in the Calendar of Science. In his later years we are assured that Charles Darwin "attained to the condition of agnosticism." To his cautious and reverent mind, as to Newton's, the crude dogmatism of the Atheist was repulsive. By the side of Darwin lies the great astronomer, Sir John Herschell, of whom one who knew him well said that of all the scientific men of his acquaintance he was "supremely at the head for knowledge, simplicity, and humility." His private life, we are told, "was one unbroken tenor of domestic affection and unostentatious piety." Walk westwards from



the graves of Newton, Darwin, and Herschell, and you will find, but a few yards distant, the stone which bears the name of the illustrious geologist Sir Charles Lyell. Of him we have this testimony from the pen of Dean Stanley. "From early youth to extreme old age it was to him a solemn religious duty to be incessantly learning, constantly growing, fearlessly correcting his own mistakes, always ready to receive and reproduce from others that which he had not in himself. Science and religion for him were not only not divorced, but were one and indivisible." Quite recently, as you all know, another Leader of Science has spoken in that reverent and humble spirit, which is common both to true Science and to sound Theology. "Scientific thought," wrote Lord Kelvin a few weeks since, "is compelled to accept the idea of Creative Power. Forty years ago I asked Liebig, walking somewhere in the country, if he believed that the grass and flowers which we saw around us grew by mere chemical forces. He answered, 'No, no more than I could believe that a book of botany describing them could grow by mere chemical forces.'" To the true man of science the cheap dogmatism of the atheist is not unfairly stigmatised in the brusque phrase of the Psalmist, "The fool hath said in his



heart, There is no God." Therefore, although for quite intelligible reasons there is a certain reluctance in our minds to consider a subject which seems to lie outside the main stream of our interest, and in itself to transcend the knowledge of which our faculties can take firm hold, I submit that there is no real justification in Science for this reluctance, and nothing from Science but rebuke for the coarse and violent creed of Atheism.

Science, remember, is inexorably true to facts. It refuses to leave outside its reckoning any fact, however inconvenient to fit into the scheme of things, however difficult to analyse and relate. Science requires us to take account of all facts ; and, just in proportion to its inability to do this, confesses that its materials are inadequate, and its theories provisional. In the remarkable words which form the second part of my text, we have set before us most impressively a Fact which cannot be reasonably disputed or left out of reckoning.

"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ?" The words are the personal confession of a Jew, obviously in circumstances of affliction, who lived some two



thousand five hundred years ago. Between him and us it is hard to find many points of contact. He would not have understood our politics, and philosophy, and art. Our complicated civilisation would have amazed him, and he would have had little sympathy with our social ideals. And certainly he would have been fully as unintelligible to us; and yet, the words which I have read go home to our hearts, and utter with perfect fidelity their secret aspiration. There is not one of us here who does not feel their searching truth, whose heart does not thrill responsively to their plaintive music. And it has always been so. Age after age this unknown Jew has offered his confession to his fellow-men, and they have taken it up, owned it, and echoed it as verily theirs. The mighty cleavage between Judaism and Christianity made no difference; the wreckage of the ancient Empire and the influx of strange barbarous races never interrupted for a day the chain of spiritual yearning which binds the ages; and now in this last hour of human history we in our turn confess the truth and endorse the prayer which found expression thus: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before



God?" Science admits, and on its own principles must take account of the fact, that man everywhere and always is religious, that his strangely mingled nature includes this element of a religious faculty, that he is by some interior coercion for ever driven to transcend his own limitations, to stretch hands of entreaty to a Power beyond himself, to confess relationship with the Unseen and the Eternal. In truth, the Psalmist is the spokesman of mankind, and his words convey the essence of universal religion since mankind was.

The fact cannot be disputed. How is it to be explained? Now Science, as alone we know it, science in common parlance, the science which is called physical, appears unable to move beyond one or other of two positions. On the one hand, there are scientific men who say with Lord Kelvin that they are compelled "to accept the idea of Creative Power." On the other hand, there are those, perhaps the majority, who would profess themselves to be agnostics. They would impartially repudiate both the Theist and the Atheist dogma. Their attitude might be well described by one of themselves, whom I quote the more willingly as none will dispute his right to be taken as a representative of modern science.



"The whole order of nature," recently wrote Professor Ray Lankester, "including living and lifeless matter—man, animal, and gas—is a network of mechanism, the main features and many details of which have been made more or less obvious to the wondering intelligence of mankind by the labour and ingenuity of scientific investigators. But no sane man has ever pretended, since science became a definite body of doctrine, that we know, or ever can hope to know or conceive of the possibility of knowing, whence this mechanism has come, why it is there, whither it is going, and what there may or may not be beyond and beside it which our senses are incapable of appreciating. These things are not 'explained' by science, and never can be."

I can understand scientific men demurring to so strict a limitation of boundaries; and I confess that it seems to me hardly scientific to make so grave an assumption, but for our present purpose we may accept the position of Science to be that which the Professor describes. In plain terms, it comes to this, that, in front of this Fact of the inherent religiousness of men, Science is dumb. But the Fact remains, and we must seek its explanation elsewhere than in the lecture-hall and laboratories of physical science.



And the explanation must be adequate to the fact which it professes to explain. Remember, we have to do with the most potent force we can recognise as working in human society when we treat of Religion. Alike for good and for evil Religion stands in the hierarchy of social influences without an equal. This inward hunger for God, which the Psalmist confesses, has taken forms the most diverse, and ministered to results the most widely different ; but always, alike in its perversions by ignorance and superstition, and in its freer expressions in holiness and service, Religion has exhibited its unique power of setting men above their circumstances, liberating them from the bondage of the material, the visible, and the temporal, and so approving itself always, in spite of frightful aberrations, to be an elevating and ennobling principle. Mankind confessedly reaches its highest excellence under the influence of Religion. I claim still to be within the sphere of unquestionable fact. The verdict of the general conscience accords primacy to the heroes of moral endeavour, the saints and servants of humanity. Just now I called as witnesses to the essential reverence of Science, justly so called, those ever-honoured Masters of Science who sleep within these walls. With equal right I may



invoke, as confirming my present contention, the venerable names of the martyrs whose memorials we treasure here.

Underneath that floor lies David Livingstone ; just within that western wall is inscribed the name of Charles Gordon ; all about you, as you walk through this great church, are monuments of goodness, and sacrifice, and service. What, you cannot help reflecting, is the spring of this distinctive and supreme excellence which, among so much and so varied greatness, attaches uniquely to these saints and soldiers of humanity ? And you cannot but answer that it was, precisely, Religion, faith in the Unseen, the coercive and continuous sense of obligation towards and contact with God. Of them all we might say what the sacred writer says of Moses, exposed to the seductions of the Egyptian Court. They, as he, "endured as seeing Him, who is invisible." We feel that the popular poet is only uttering a half-truth when he sings—

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And departing leave behind us  
Footsteps on the sands of time.

For in all human lives that can indeed be called sublime, there is present an element which cannot



be described in terms of voluntary effort. 'God enters into those lives ; they have their inspirations in no earthly hopes ; the pilot stars which guide their course are high in the heavens. We feel that they can only be interpreted and described in terms of Religion. And if, leaving the spiritual giants, we come to men cast in a lesser mould, who have left on the page of history a record of mingled character in which elements of the heroic seem to be strangely combined with, and sometimes submerged by, other and lower elements, I think we find that all the redeeming greatness comes from Religion. They rise above themselves when they are religious. Such a man, strangely mingled of weakness and strength, was he whose name is associated with this pulpit, which now, after so long an interval, is restored to use. Archbishop Cranmer has indeed left behind him a memory heavily burdened with faults and failures. It is easy to build up against him an overwhelming indictment ; and yet, I think, no one who studies his life without prejudice rises from his study without a very real conviction of his goodness. That last scene at Oxford, when the old Primate, broken with penitence, went through to the bitter end the protracted humiliations which his enemies had devised for him, was a real revelation of latent great-



ness, and he must be a hard man who grudges to Cranmer a place among the martyrs. I say that this fact of Religion stands related to the very noblest aspects of humanity, and underlies its worthiest achievements. The explanation, which alone can merit our acceptance, must be adequate.

Science is dumb, but in our ears is another voice which claims to be the Voice of the Author of our Being speaking intelligibly in merciful Self-Revelation. We must take our choice between the vague Theism or vaguer Agnosticism, which is all that physical Science can bring to us, and the Faith in God which Jesus Christ proclaims. There is the fact : here is the explanation. Is it adequate ? What, let us ask, is, apart from theological technicalities, the essential Truth which the Trinitarian doctrine enshrines ? It will suffice, for our present purpose, to distinguish two constituent notions of our belief. On the one hand, Trinitarianism includes the truth which philosophy, ancient and modern, has insisted upon, that the universe is everywhere indwelt by God, that God is immanent in phenomena, their source, their sustaining principle, their formative, inherent force ; and while thus satisfying what seems to be an essential requirement of our reflective reason, Trinitarianism insists upon



the correlative truth which has its perpetual witness in the human conscience, that God transcends the universe which He indwells, that He can best be conceived in that description of Personality which is the category of the highest existence we know. On the other hand, Trinitarianism endorses, explains, and satisfies the "thirst for God" which burns in the spirit of man. For God has made man for Himself; and in man moves His Spirit for ever witnessing to an origin and a destiny which are Divine; and man, just in proportion to his goodness as man, comes to be more completely competent for fellowship with God, so that, in truth, manhood in its perfection is the true instrument by which God can be made known. Trinitarianism is the philosophic basis of the belief in the Incarnation; the Incarnation is, precisely, the climax of Divine Self-revelation, the declaration of God in and by Jesus Christ. To this cry of the Psalmist, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Christianity answers by an appeal to the best in man, and then sets us in audience of the Best Man, who was also God. First, we are to recognise and confess the Divine within ourselves; then we are to recognise and confess the Divine in Christ. "He hath shewed



thee, O man, what is good : and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." All the message of all the prophets, Jewish and ethnic, is summed up in this single utterance. But that truth of the inherent righteousness of God, attested ever by the human conscience, could not sustain itself against the pressure of rival and plausible claimants on man's acceptance. Do we not know how hard it is even for us to hold that faith in God? The God-revealing goodness of man's nature is strangely obscured by traits of selfishness and depravity, so prevailing and so inveterate as to challenge to themselves the principal right therein ; and on that wavering and divided humanity there are always bearing down the sinister pressures of a world grown old in evil, steeped in immemorial sin ; and around every man always are the threatening witness of an universe which is as the vast shambles of perpetual and wanton slaughter, and the pitiful legend of human fate sobbing ever in the house of Life. Yes ; I do not think the solitary witness within, unhelped, uncheered, unsanctioned, could hold its own against these manifold and besetting rivals. But Christianity not only authenticates the testimony within, but



points us to the Christ without. To the yearning cry of the human spirit, stricken with fear and loneliness in the great solitude of being, aghast before the enigma of death and the veiled mystery beyond—the cry of the strayed child for the Hand of the Father in the night of desertion, “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God”—Christ makes answer in words of invitation: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” In Christ we see the Ideal of humanity and the Image of the Father. In making God known to us He reveals to us also ourselves, whence we come, what we may be, whereto we are tending. “I and the Father are one”—so He links together man and God, and consecrates manhood to be for ever the mirror of Godhead, and disallows the suggestions of experience, and enables the victories of faith. “Seeing it is God that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ.”



So, the All-Great, were the All-loving too—  
So, through the thunder comes a human voice  
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here !  
" Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself !  
" Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine :  
" But love I gave thee, with myself to love,  
" And thou must love me, who have died for thee !"

Yes ; the God Whom we Christians worship, the  
God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a God  
Who loves us and Whom we love.



## IX

### CHRISTIANITY, THE CLIMAX OF THEISM<sup>1</sup>

LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED : YE BELIEVE IN GOD, BELIEVE  
ALSO IN ME.—*St. John* xiv. 1.

MANY causes have united in bringing about a state of unrest within the sphere of Religion. It seems to be the case that crises of intellectual disturbance are recurrent among Christians, and, certainly, they never fail to bring severe mental distress and, in some instances, even a total collapse of belief to individuals, while they seem to lower the whole standard of religious sincerity, and to bring a blight upon spiritual enthusiasm. At such crises Christian men are, in spite of themselves, compelled to examine the conventional formulæ of belief, and to discover what are the foundations of their own personal

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the fourth Sunday after Epiphany (February 1, 1903) in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



religion. And there can be no question that this process is both painful and salutary. Painful it must always be to bring under discussion and analysis convictions that we have received as so Divinely true as to be above cavil or inquiry; salutary it can never fail to be to rise, at whatever cost of personal suffering, out of the unquestioning receptiveness of childhood into the anxious caution and deliberate decision of responsible manhood. Such a crisis of mental sifting, and, through mental sifting, of spiritual development, came to the disciples of Christ when "His hour came" and He had to pass away from them. The wonderful discourses in the upper room, spoken at the Table of the first Eucharist—which give to the Fourth Gospel its extraordinary and imperishable attractiveness—discover to us the Master, fully conscious of the trial about to come upon His followers by reason of His departure, engaged in the tender and difficult task of preparing them in advance. Take what view you will of the difficult and, as yet, unsolved problems raised by criticism as to the date, origin, and character of the Fourth Gospel, and still the intrinsic power and beauty of those discourses (set as they are in an historic context so pathetic and so probable, and bearing to the modern reader the



solemn affirmations and credentials of eighteen centuries of spiritual testing and spiritual acceptance) will secure for them a place in your regard, which is scarcely, if at all, lower than any which unquestioning piety could provide. Personally, I am convinced that these inimitable discourses enshrine a genuine Dominical tradition, delivered, either directly or at second hand, through the agency of "the disciple whom Jesus loved"; and, to my thinking, the fact that, as they stand in the Gospel, they are not the *ipsissima verba* of the Master Himself, but a free yet careful version of His teaching by one who had absorbed it into the very texture and course of his own thought, realised it in its coherent wholeness, and added to it the authentication of his own spiritual experience, so far from diminishing, does even enhance its value for us. Be this as it may, I shall not ask you this morning to give any other authority to the text than that which belongs to it as deeply and luminously true. My thesis is that in the words before us we have the true line of Christian Apologetic indicated, that belief in Christ is a legitimate consequence of belief in God, and that, in truth, Christianity is the climax and flower of Theism. Whether the words be Christ's very own, or rather St. John's, or even



words of some disciple of St. John, summarising thus the remembered teachings of the Master, they ring true to Christian experience in the past and in the present: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

There is a rational order in which we must consider the affirmations of the Creed; for, in truth, those affirmations are not mutually independent; they cohere and hang together, and to isolate any one of them from its logical basis in what precedes, and from its legitimate interpretation in what follows, is to act irrationally, and to induce intellectual confusion.

We cannot fairly discuss belief in the Incarnation apart from its presupposition, Theism, for it claims to be the true logical outcome of Theistic belief. The argument—stated in its simplest form—proceeds in a series of inferences as to what is inherently probable, which meet, explain, and, in explaining, are verified by a series of appropriate facts. We infer an intelligent Author of the Universe from the fact that the Universe is intelligible; and we infer that the intelligence of the Author of the Universe must be similar to our own because the Universe is intelligible to us, and because, indeed, we cannot conceive of any other kind of intelligence than our own. Again, we infer a Personal Creator because



impersonal intelligence is unthinkable to us, and because the only original and creative force which we know is the force of volition, and we cannot conceive of volition except as the attribute of a person. Therefore, since an origin of the universe is an intellectual necessity, and the only originating force we can imagine is that of personal will, we move boldly to the conclusion that an act of will on the part of a Personal God was the ultimate cause of all things. Necessarily, having once committed ourselves to this process of inference, we move far on our course. The universe within us becomes even more rich in suggestion than the world without. We are saved from the alluring inference of pantheism by the persistent protest of conscience. In face of the threatening suggestions of the world's manifold and ubiquitous misery—the gigantic wastage of life implied in evolution, the immense disasters of earthquake, pestilence, and famine, the more poignant and persistent anguish of moral evil—we appeal to the witness of our own nature, and we do not appeal in vain. Still "the Kingdom of God is within us," and we ourselves are the key of the Universe. From that ideal of moral excellence enshrined in our own breasts, we necessarily infer the inherent moral perfection of our Creator. We



credit to Him the Absolute of every relative virtue, making ourselves, by an inevitable audacity, the basis and standard of our belief. The probability of revelation is an inference from our conception of a Righteous Person as the Author of all things. We cannot suppose that such a God would have implanted in men the religious instinct only to disappoint it; we cannot believe that in an universe, in which appetite and the satisfaction of appetite are everywhere united, there should be this portentous exception, that the highest want of all, the hunger of the human spirit, should have no satisfaction. "God has taken the initiative, as we believe, in creating us, and we are compelled to conclude that He will continue to take the initiative in satisfying the desires which He has created." I think Mr. Illingworth does not speak too strongly when he says that "it is impossible to exaggerate the necessity of the inference that if God created us, He must reveal Himself to us. All the multitudinous and complex considerations, therefore, which make for Theism, make also, through Theism, for revelation."<sup>1</sup>

From nature and conscience we address ourselves to History, and here, again, we encounter a series of facts which are full of religious suggestion—facts,

<sup>1</sup> *Reason and Revelation*, pp. 150-151.



moreover, which accord with impressive distinctness with the inferences which we have already made. Particularly three facts may be mentioned. There is the fact of progress, gradual and intermittent, but still constant; and there is the fact of personality as a dominant factor in that progress; and there is the fact of religious aspiration becoming purer and stronger as humanity rises out of primitive savagery, and is disciplined by the subtle and manifold influences of civilisation. From these facts also emerges a further inference, which may be stated in the words of Principal Fairbairn, who has drawn and applied it with his wonted ability. "If then [he says] man, by his moral being touches the skirts of God, and God in enforcing His law is ever, by means of great persons, shaping the life of man to its diviner issues, what could be more consonant, alike with man's nature and God's method of forming or reforming it, than that He should send a supreme Personality as the vehicle of highest good to the race? Without such a Personality the moral forces of time would lack unity, and without unity they would be without organization, purpose, or efficiency. If a Person has appeared in history who has achieved such a position and fulfilled such functions, how can He be more fitly described than as the Son of God and the



Saviour of man?"<sup>1</sup> The text exactly summarises this argument: "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Do not defraud yourself of the full content of your belief in a Personal God, but claim all that legitimately follows therefrom—Revelation of Himself to man, and that made so as best to correspond with man's nature, and therefore itself ministered gradually through illuminated persons, and reaching its climax in a Person. "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

It may be the case, and it certainly is the very general impression, that the successive inferences which form the basis of Theism have been seriously shaken by the course of modern thought, notably in the domain of Physical Science. It cannot honestly be denied that grave difficulties attach to the creed of Theism. Religion has always demanded, and will always demand, that quality of faith which brings to the assistance of reason a subtler and a bolder faculty, and restrains it from the violence it is tempted to do to itself. Some of you will have read the admirable articles in which a well-known teacher of science has recently discussed "the reconciliation between science and faith." He states with relentless lucidity the apparent contradiction, and then he

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 93.



indicates the direction in which he believes a harmony will ultimately be reached. He warns us against accepting the current orthodoxies of Science and Faith as the final witness of either ; and bids us look forward to a time when, on the one hand, Science shall admit within its pale those moral and spiritual phenomena which are unquestionably within the universe of fact ; and when, on the other, Religion shall accept the irrevocable verdicts of this " completer Science." One sentence is so germane to my present contention that I will quote it. This, says Sir Oliver Lodge, is the lesson Science has to teach theology—"to look for the action of the Deity, if at all, then always ; not in the past alone, nor only in the future, but equally in the present. If His action is not visible now, it never will be, and never has been visible."<sup>1</sup> But this is no new teaching ; it has always been included in the higher Christian theology. It is the burden of the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, and underlies its whole conception of Christ. The Incarnation is shown to be symmetrical with the whole course of Divine action ; not a sudden portent, or a miraculous interruption, or a new start, but a climax, a continuation, and a plenitude of what in measure had already been.

<sup>1</sup> *Hibbert Journal*, p. 214 [Jan. 1903].



"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man coming into the world. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us."  
"My Father worketh even until now, and I work."  
"Ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death  
Of which I wrote "it was"—to me, it is ;  
—Is, here and now ; I apprehend nought else.  
Is not God now i' the world His power first made ?  
Is not His love at issue still with sin,  
Visibly when a wrong is done on earth ?<sup>1</sup>

The course of Christian Apologetic is from Theism to Christ. Given the premises of Theism, is the Incarnation a probable and congruous conclusion? The claim of Christianity is that precisely. "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." In judging that claim the verdict of reason and conscience on the historic Christ is of cardinal, nay, of final importance. A sentence from the Gospel before us puts the case in a nutshell. Christ is represented as throwing down a challenge to His contemporaries ; it is in truth the challenge which is thrown down to

<sup>1</sup> Browning, "A Death in the Desert."



every generation, nay, to every individual. "Which of you convicteth Me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe Me?" In other words, if the God, Whose power and wisdom are discernible in the ordered and beautiful universe, Whose essential character is discovered in the monitions of conscience, the "categorical imperative" of duty, Whose love for man is revealed in the mysterious blessedness of spiritual fellowship which has rewarded the aspirations and disciplines of the noblest members of the race, and is in measure given to every man—if this God should come yet closer to His creation, and discover the whole truth about Himself in such wise that men should be able to receive it, if He were to make a human character and a human career the medium of a Self-Revelation, which should be completely satisfying, would the historic Jesus be adequate to the demands of so tremendous a theory?

"Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." "Who say ye that I am?" When we thus carry the whole question to the bar of History, let us be careful not to play with words. It is vital to the validity of our conclusion that we should base it on the genuine testimony of History, not on some attractive substitute, however ancient and richly



embroidered with devotional fancy. When we bear this in mind, we perceive the solemn mission and momentous importance of that Science which claims to recognise, disentangle, and declare the historic truth, which comes to us in the mingled traditions of a distant past. We have been frequently reminded in recent years that historical investigation in the religious sphere will always be dominated by the mental presuppositions of the student. The fact of miracles, for instance, will be certified or denied according as the inquirer admits or repudiates their possibility. There is obvious truth here, and it is the high duty of every student to make very sure that he has realized and allowed for his mental presuppositions before he sets his hand to the task of inquiry. But let us not exaggerate the truth or misapply it. Evidence and the rules of evidence, reasoning and the laws of reasoning, are not figments of fancy, but realities; and precisely in proportion to our just grasp of them, and the place we give them in historical inquiry, is that inquiry the minister of truth. We have no other means for discovering the method by which the Incarnation, if it happened at all, did actually happen. And presumptions as to the fitting mode of an Incarnation seem to me



inadmissible as well as precarious. They are inadmissible, because what concerns us is not what might, or, in our opinion, ought to have happened, but what verily did happen. They are precarious, because of the almost infinite variety of men's minds. To one religious thinker, for example, the fact of the Virgin Birth of Christ seems so congruous to the Incarnation as to be practically inseparable from it even in thought. To another, that fact has an altogether opposite character, and seems to be but little consistent with the true naturalness of the Incarnation. To a third—and this seems to me the most reasonable and religious attitude—the traditional dogma has its validity, not from *a priori* considerations, but, primarily, from the verdict of history. The Incarnation is matter of faith. "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." The mode and circumstances of the Incarnation are matter of fact. "Who say ye that I am?"

It seems to me not unprofitable to draw attention at this time to the true order of Christian *credenda*, for many influences tend to obscure it, and there are already no doubtful signs that the obscuration has worked mischief. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that modern Christians



have inverted the order of the text. They believe in Christ, and therefore they believe in God. Indeed, this would seem to be the inevitable order of discipleship. Christ calls men to Himself. "Come unto Me," "Follow Me," and in obedience to His summons men come also to God; but Christian Apologetic is not concerned with disciples, as such, but with those who are not disciples, but, at most, friendly inquirers. Therefore the order of reason is the order of Apologetic. First Theism, then Christianity. "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Every Theist is to that extent Christian, that is to say, Christianity is the logical inference from his Theistic belief. A Christianity which violates Theism is a contradiction in terms. And, on this Sunday, when my preaching is followed by the Holy Communion, perhaps I may fitly make one further observation. That blessed and comfortable Sacrament must not so be thought of and so treated as to interpose the historic Jesus, "Christ according to the flesh," between us and our Father in heaven. Let me make my meaning clearer by adopting some words of the late Bishop Westcott. "On all sides (he says) we find a growing tendency in popular forms of worship, which is dominant in modern hymns addressed to 'Jesus,'



to put, as it were, into the background the glory and the love of the Father, and so to weaken our sense of the unity, the spirituality, the majesty of God, though the regular use of the Old Testament, and specially of the Psalter, ought to guard us against this serious danger. The tendency springs from a natural sentiment which has elsewhere found expression in Mariolatry, and is more attractive because it corresponds with the temper of the time which strives to give a material shape to its loftiest thoughts. We shall, indeed, guard most jealously the true divinity of the Son, and offer to Him, our Creator and Redeemer, in humblest adoration, prayers and praises and thanksgivings, but in all we shall follow the rule of Holy Scripture and not forget the love of the Father, the fountain of Godhead, who is habitually spoken of in the New Testament absolutely as God in immediate connection with Christ, the Father who sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Communion is Christ's ladder set up on the earth, whose top reaches to heaven. Thereby we ascend to God through Him, for through Him we have our access in one Spirit unto the Father. The patriarch's dream revealed

<sup>1</sup> *Lessons from Work*, pp. 53-54.



what actually had been existent all the while, though he knew it not. Holy Communion protests to us the unsuspected sanctity of common life, and bids us know the nearness of God. That is the central and vitalising reality of Sacramental Worship. All else is picture, and parable, and vesture of truth. Words, gestures, the "creatures of Bread and Wine," have their worth and meaning as tokens and pledges of a spiritual fact, that "in Him we live and move and have our being," that "we are Christ's and Christ is God's." Therefore on the threshold of Holy Communion the words of the Gospel come to us with direct and luminous relevance: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me."



## X

### THE SINLESSNESS OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

WHICH OF YOU CONVICTETH ME OF SIN? IF I SAY TRUTH,  
WHY DO YE NOT BELIEVE ME?—*St. John* viii. 46.

FOR WE HAVE NOT A HIGH PRIEST THAT CANNOT BE TOUCHED  
WITH THE FEELING OF OUR INFIRMITIES: BUT ONE THAT HATH  
BEEN IN ALL POINTS TEMPTED LIKE AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN.  
—*Hebrews* iv. 15.

As the season of Lent draws towards its close, the thoughts of Christian folk are directed ever more intently to the character of Jesus Christ as it was revealed under the cruel and searching trials of Passion-tide. The Gospels are comparatively full and detailed in their narratives of the last scenes of the Master's life on earth, and there is in those narratives a remarkable absence of the miraculous or supernatural elements, which cannot but embarrass the critical student of the sacred history, and draw into his consideration of the record thoughts which

<sup>1</sup> Preached in Westminster Abbey on Passion Sunday, March 20, 1904.



are properly alien to piety. We may state the case in this way. Here, in the story of the Passion, historical criticism has little objection to offer to the Christian belief, and here, precisely, the vital core of that belief is most clearly shown, and most securely guarded. On Passion Sunday it cannot be an unsuitable, and may, perhaps, be no unprofitable choice of subject, if we select the sinlessness of Christ as the theme of our preaching. Perhaps I ought to preface my sermon with a few words of explanation and justification of my choice of text. The two passages which I have read to you belong to two books of the New Testament, which, though admittedly of supreme spiritual worth, have been conspicuously subjected to critical questioning both in ancient and in modern times—the Gospel according to St. John, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Both compositions belong to the later Apostolic age, and may, therefore, be rather regarded as proving the current belief of Christians about our Lord, than as unexceptionable evidence of the facts of His history. “The Gospels,” it has been truly and tersely said, “are the first Christian creed; they are the naïve expression of the creed in history.”<sup>1</sup> The earliest documents of the Christian Society had their origin

<sup>1</sup> Moffatt, *Hist. N. T.* p. 27.



in the necessities of believers, and presupposed a belief about Christ. The origin of this belief is the really vital question for Christians, not the origin of the books which imply it. Not to pursue this point further now, I wish to make it plain that for our present discussion no other character of the documents quoted is required than that which all reasonable critics will allow to them, viz. that of proofs of the belief about Jesus Christ which obtained in the Apostolic Church. In this sermon we shall limit ourselves to the single point of Christ's sinlessness.

Our first proposition must obviously be this, that the Apostolic writings do clearly emphasise this remarkable feature of Christ's career: that it was without sin. "Who did no sin," is St. Peter's phrase about Christ. "Him who knew no sin," is the kindred expression of St. Paul. "In Him is no sin," writes St. John in his first epistle. "Without sin," is the similar description of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Now, of course, it may be said very reasonably that since all the writers of the New Testament did undoubtedly believe that Jesus Christ was, in a supreme and unique sense, Divine, "the Son of God," it might go without saying that they believed Him to be sinless; but on reflection I think you will recognise a really important distinction,



of very considerable value when we are seeking the origin of our belief in the unique Divineness of Christ. "Sinlessness," as the quality of a human career, lends itself to the inquiry which it assuredly provokes ; we cannot but raise and seek to answer the questions, Does the evidence bear out the theory? What does sinlessness imply? and so forth. Divineness, however, is a conception of another kind, and may carry many differences of meaning ; it is outside the possibility of historic proof, and lies altogether within the sphere of religious belief. "Sinlessness" may, or may not, authorise the attribution of "divineness" ; but the attribution of "divineness" cannot justify to a thoughtful inquirer that of "sinlessness," if the evidence be insufficient or hostile.

Our next proposition points to the important fact that the New Testament writers were not unconscious of the extraordinary character of this "sinlessness" with which they credited Christ, nor with the marked exception which it formed to the generally normal aspect of His life. It would not be true to say that the Synoptic portraiture of Christ is in the main supernatural. The "Son of Man," as described by His biographers, is genuinely human, and moves easily among His contemporaries. There are supernatural elements in the records, no doubt,



but they do not obliterate the historical figure of the Saviour, nor destroy the generally normal aspect of His earthly course. Mystery there is in abundance, but the true manhood stands out always to view. It would be difficult to construct a juster summary of the Synoptic account of our Lord than that which the text contains. "We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." In the great age of doctrinal definition the Fathers of the Church, working out to its logical conclusions their complete and coherent Christology, had no difficulty in sweeping away Docetic notions about Christ as altogether inconsistent with the Gospels. Whatever else might be said of Him, this at least must be said, that He was truly man. The sacred writers speak quite simply of His growth in wisdom and stature, of His hunger and thirst, of His weariness, of His surprise, of His indignation, of His grief, of His bodily suffering, of His death, of His burial. They represent Him as having a friend's affection for the beloved disciple, a kindly anxiety for the hungry crowds that followed Him, a very human fondness for children, a very human contempt for the solemn hypocrites who were plotting His destruction. Only



one invariable human trait is absent from the portrait they draw. There is no sin in Christ, and what is not less amazing, there is no consciousness of sin. Have you ever reflected on the extraordinary suggestiveness of this? Christ was beyond all question deeply and genuinely religious. Take the lowest view of Him you will, and you cannot but admit as much as that. But religion, just in so far as it is deep and genuine, utters itself—so far as human experience shows—in penitence. Just in proportion to the sincerity of the religious man is his conviction of personal guilt, his sense of the overwhelming holiness of God. Read the sixth chapter of Isaiah, or the fifty-first Psalm—to take examples of piety which are above suspicion and beyond criticism—and you find yourself in the atmosphere of self-conscious unworthiness. “Woe is me!” exclaims the prophet, “for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts.” “My sin is ever before me,” wails the Psalmist. “Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight.” Herein, moreover, we know that both prophet and psalmist are truly representative of religious men in all ages. We might almost



make consciousness of sin the distinguishing mark of genuine piety. Yet here, in the Christ described by the Evangelists, is the single exception to the otherwise universal rule. The most deeply religious, the most genuinely pious of all the members of our race has, so far as we can discover, no consciousness of sin. Whether the words of the text were actually spoken or not makes no difference to their importance as summing up this amazing aspect of the life of Jesus. That life was a successful challenge to all who beheld it. The contemporaries of Christ really were confronted by the question, which the author of the Fourth Gospel attributes to Christ Himself: "Which of you convicteth Me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe Me?"

There is, moreover, another proposition, of no slight importance, which forces itself irresistibly on the mind of the serious student of the New Testament. The sinlessness of Christ was shown in a type of character, and in a manner of living which were extremely difficult for the Apostles to understand or to appreciate. There was an originality about their Master's excellence which perplexed even while it attracted them. We can hardly picture to ourselves wherein this originality consisted better than by taking the Beatitudes with which the Sermon on



the Mount begins, and contrasting them with the moral teaching which might fairly be extracted from the best contemporaries of Christ, as well ethnic as Jewish. Much that we should freely own to be admirable would be given us in that teaching, much that we may wonder to find apparently ignored by the Teacher of Teachers ; but this appears to me beyond question, that from such comparison the astonishing originality of the Beatitudes, as indicating a system of morality, would be manifest to all. Christ's life was the classic illustration (if I may adopt that too commonplace phrase) of the morality of the Beatitudes ; the type of character which He exhibited was the reflection of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, and it has been reproduced on the earth, partially and fitfully indeed, but always recognisably, wherever those principles have been seriously accepted, and made the basis of action. The ethics of mankind have had to include a new conception of moral excellence since Christ came, that, namely, which we can but call Christ-like. Now originality is a great hindrance to just recognition. Men need to understand in order to appreciate ; they resent what they cannot understand. The secret of earning general respect and general affection is to be quite intelligible and



frankly normal. This is a truth which experience continually attests. If we ask the explanation of the wide popularity enjoyed by such a sovereign as George III., we shall find it in the circumstance that both in his faults and in his virtues he was a typical Englishman of his time—simple, just where his prejudices did not cloud his judgment, obstinate, genuinely pious, clean-living, personally brave. It is inevitable that to-day I should illustrate my thesis by a yet more recent example. The venerable prince, George III.'s grandson, who passed away last week full of years and honours, was a conspicuous instance of the popularity which attaches to a frankly representative character. The Duke of Cambridge was always intelligible to average Englishmen; they shared his modes of thinking and feeling; his excellences and his failings were what they knew to be also, in measure, their own. His interests were frankly those of other honourable Englishmen; and he served them with the tenacious loyalty which itself is no mean evidence of sincerity. His memory will be treasured by the ancient and famous institutions, such as Christ's Hospital and the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy, to which he freely gave time and labour. Perhaps the most obvious and most fre-



quently expressed opinion about the late Duke is that he was a typical Englishman of his generation. This is high praise or the reverse according to the speaker's estimate of the average morality of Englishmen. I am free to confess that to my mind—not impartial of course on this subject, but not consciously unfair—it is a great thing to say in summary of a career, lived throughout its whole course in the widest publicity, and protracted to the extreme verge of human life, that it was the life of a typical Englishman, and as such commanded the affectionate respect of a nation, which, beyond other nations, venerates sincerity, duty, and religion. But to return to my argument. Christ's originality was a hindrance to His being understood and appreciated by His Apostles. Throughout His course there were constant misapprehensions ; and these—as the closing scenes of the Drama of His Life drew on—led to desertion, denial, and the treason of betrayal. Now I ask you to consider whether this chronic misapprehension of Christ does not add greatly to the unanimous testimony of the Apostles that He was without sin. If they had really—as the opponents of Christianity suggest—constructed a version of Christ's career to match a theory about Him which they had been led to form under



influences, emotional, superstitious, what you will, which had no springs in actual experience, how different a type of manhood they would, being what they were, have necessarily imagined! Read the current Jewish literature, and the sub-apostolic writings which have reached us, and ask yourself whether the men who wrote and who admired those compositions could have been the authors of that conception of Manhood which confronts us in the records of the New Testament. The contemporaries of Christ sum up His uniqueness by describing Him as "without sin"; they conceive Him as challenging the verdict of men's consciences on Himself: "Which of you convicteth Me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe Me?" How does this claim to sinlessness stand in the judgment of us men of the modern time?

"Christ's character," it has been truly said, "is the one miracle vitally important to faith. Believers could part with the physical miracles of the Gospels if science or exegesis demanded the sacrifice; but if a sinless Christ were taken from us on the plea that the moral order of the world knows only of imperfect men, all would be lost."<sup>1</sup> From this I

<sup>1</sup> *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, p. 321, by Professor A. B. Bruce.



do not dissent save in the use of the word "imperfect," which appears to be unfortunately chosen ; for the rest, I agree that the sinlessness of Christ is vital to Christianity. How then, I ask, does the matter stand to-day, as from our modern standpoint we examine the facts? At least, I would submit that the most exacting criticism of the documents has not disallowed the Apostolic belief. Much change has been made in our estimate of Christ ; we understand that much more of His teaching was shaped by the circumstances of His time and race than once was thought to be the case ; we accept without difficulty the assurance of those who claim to know that the teaching of the Son of Man included much that was already current ; we are not concerned to deny that with respect to large tracts of knowledge our Saviour, so far as we are able to learn, stood with His own generation. His notions about science and history and the sacred literature of His nation may have been, for aught we know to the contrary, as limited as those of His epoch. We are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews that "it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren," and we have no other means of knowing how far that Self-surrender to human limitations proceeded than the records of



the Apostolic age. There is nothing sinful in unavoidable ignorance, nothing incompatible with sinlessness in the natural limitations of humanity ; but if, indeed, it could be fairly made out that Jesus Christ was morally defective, then Christianity, as I can see the truth, would perish, for every notion of Incarnation that we can frame requires a perfect congruity of the creature which reveals and the Creator who is revealed : any intrusion of wilful sin would destroy the adequacy of the Manhood of Christ to be the Sacrament of Deity, and would incapacitate His life for its sublime purpose of showing forth the Character of God. You will understand, therefore, with what anxiety I review the evidences and seek a decision on this decisive issue.

So I reach my final proposition. The New Testament, read in the light of honest criticism, justifies, so far as documents can justify, the Apostolic doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ. Let me observe that in bringing a human career lived out in the first century to be judged by the moral standard accepted in the twentieth we are applying a test, the most severe imaginable. If we were judging a man, in order to appraise his merits, this test were the unjustest in the world ; but in the case of the Son of Man, it is



not so much just as inevitable. He, whom we Christians worship as the Incarnate Creator, must be able to command the homage not of one age only, but of all ages. Let the moral standard of mankind be raised as high as you will, it must never rise above the standard of Christ; nay, His standard must always be the goal towards which the moral effort of the race is moving, and never a single advance in goodness must be unable to find its interpretation and justification in the complete goodness of the Son of Man. Applying, therefore, necessarily our educated twentieth-century consciences to the historic Jesus, is He stripped of His attribute of sinlessness? Rationalists of the baser sort accumulate what they describe as immoral, or contradictory, or unreasonable teachings from the Gospels, but, if you will have the patience to examine their procedure you will find that it violates every accepted canon of sound criticism and cautious interpretation. Fairly examined, honestly interpreted, the teaching of Christ—there can be no doubt about it—commands the deliberate approval of the general conscience of our age. John Stuart Mill uttered the deliberate conviction of the wisest thinkers of our modern world when he wrote that “not even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to



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find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life.”<sup>1</sup> Thus the Sage of the nineteenth century does homage to the Galilean peasant of the first! But what of Christ Himself? What of Christ’s recorded actions? Do they bear out the theory of His sinlessness? I have heard men object against the episodes of the Blasting of the Barren Fig-tree, and of the Destruction of the Gadarene Swine; but then, who will seriously maintain the historical character of either narrative as it stands? What critical student of the Gospel does not recognise in those strange stories, so sharply distinguished from the rest of the record, precisely the presence of legendary elements, which, though comparatively slight in extent within the earliest Christian documents, are unquestionably, to some extent, present? Historical criticism, at least, permits us to relieve Jesus Christ from the embarrassing misconceptions of His primitive biographers. Besides those episodes (which are plainly irrelevant), is there anything admittedly historic within the Gospels which implies sinfulness in Jesus Christ? Frankly, I know of nothing. The challenge of the text remains, so far as our knowledge of Christ’s life

<sup>1</sup> *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 255.



is concerned, triumphantly unanswerable. "Which of you convicteth Me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe Me?" The inference which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews draws from the Life of Christ remains still valid and consoling. "For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

I would, however, crave forgiveness for even seeming to suggest that the faith by which Christians have assurance of their Master's right to their worship depends on an appeal to documents, however authoritative and venerable. It is indeed far otherwise. We—if we are Christians in fact as well as in name—not less than the writers of the New Testament, build our fabric of belief on the foundation of experience. Jesus Christ is to us, as to them, an Object of affection, and of the confidence which affection makes possible; we, as they, have carried to Him our secrets of trouble and shame, and we also have found that our trust was not misplaced. We have an interior certitude, phrase it how you will, that we have nothing to fear from the most searching criticism of the historical memorials of our Master's Life; for our knowledge of Him has

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made us secure where His Character is in question. But we cannot offer this kind of security to the men of that outer world which inquires, cavils, denies at the gates of the Church. To them we must perforce offer the humbler but more intelligible evidence of the documents ; and we do offer it with complete frankness. We accept, nay, we desire the test of historical inquiry. It cannot give us faith : that is always a spiritual achievement ; but it can, and it does, disprove the arguments against faith which a reckless scepticism advances and a timorous ignorance allows. We claim that we have a sinless Christ ; and an honest examination of the evidences certifies that there is nothing there which contradicts our claim. From that source we seek no more than that negative conclusion ; we seek no more, and we require no more. The reasons of the faith by which the negative conclusion of historical inquiry must grow into the positive affirmation of discipleship are of a higher and a firmer kind. The conscience and the heart have their place here as well as the reason ; and it is the whole manifold personality which rushes forth in the cry, " Lord, I believe : help Thou mine unbelief."



## XI

### THE WONDERFUL CONVERSION<sup>1</sup>

FOR WE PREACH NOT OURSELVES, BUT CHRIST JESUS AS LORD, AND OURSELVES AS YOUR SERVANTS FOR JESUS' SAKE. SEEING IT IS GOD, THAT SAID, LIGHT SHALL SHINE OUT OF DARKNESS, WHO SHINED IN OUR HEARTS, TO GIVE THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST.—*2 Corinthians* iv. 5-6.

THE conversion of St. Paul was an event of such importance to the Church of Christ, and therein to the religious fortunes of mankind, that no thoughtful Christian can fail to be profoundly interested in it: nay, the interest cannot be limited to those who revere the Apostle as the foremost champion of the Faith; every student of human nature and of human history must be concerned in the spiritual record of one who has stamped himself on the course of human life so firmly, and left behind him a tradition so potent and so noble. The Festival which we

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the Festival of St. Paul's Conversion (January 25, 1903) in Westminster Abbey.



keep to-day appeals to a far wider circle than that of Christian believers. St. Paul is, by universal admission, one of the Masters of mankind.

On the threshold of my sermon, I may well remind you of the unique importance of the event we are commemorating. The influence of St. Paul has been so powerful and so salutary, and exercised in so many directions, that we do not exaggerate when we describe his career as the most fruitful which the long annals of the Christian Church contains. The simplest of my hearers will be at no loss to understand the supremacy of St. Paul. It is evident on the surface of the New Testament ; it emerges from the most superficial study of Christian history ; it is confessed by the vast and various religious literature of Christendom ; it is one of the most certain facts of current Christianity. Take the case of the New Testament. St. Paul's is the central figure of the last and longest portion of the book of the Acts. Of the twenty-one Epistles no less than thirteen claim him for their author ; and of the remaining eight, at least four are manifestly leavened by his teaching. Of the four Gospels, the longest was written by one of his disciples and distinctly reflects his influence. If we pass from the New Testament to the history



of the Christian Society, it is still St. Paul who dominates the scene. He is the true founder of the historic Catholic Church, for he first grasped the universality of the Gospel; he fought the good fight of Christian liberty, and won it. He is the ultimate author of the distinctive theology of Western Christendom. St. Augustine and Luther—the two most potent theologians of the West—were the echoes of St. Paul. Modern critical studies have abundantly confirmed the traditional supremacy of St. Paul. The genuineness of almost all his epistles—it is hardly excessive to say all, save the Pastorals, which constitute a separate literary problem not yet solved—is now generally conceded by critical scholars, and these documents form the necessary starting-point for the investigation of Christian origins. For the scientific historian of Christianity, not less than for the average believer, St. Paul is, next to the Divine Founder Himself, the principal figure of Church History. The personality of the Apostle is as attractive as his influence has been great. We know more about him than about any of the Apostles; and all we know is wonderfully pleasing. It would be easy to collect a striking series of appreciations of his character from students of every type, but we may content ourselves with one of the



latest. "The 'striking originality' of Paul's character," observes Professor Findlay, "is 'due to the fruitful combination in it of two spiritual forces, which are seldom found united in this degree in one personality—dialectical power and religious inspiration.' . . . Add to these attributes the apostle's heart of fire, the glow of passion and imagination which fused his mystical intuitions and logical apprehensions into one, his fine sensibility, his resolute will, his manly sincerity and courage and woman-like tenderness, his vivacity, subtlety, and humour, his rich humanity and keen faculty of moral observation, his adroitness and ready tact, his genius for organization and in-born power of command, and the vigorous and creative though not facile gift of expression that supplied the fitting dress, as original as the thought behind it, with which his doctrine clothed itself,—all these qualities and powers went to the making of Jesus Christ's apostle to the nations, the master-builder of the universal Church and of Christian theology."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the man who found the supreme crisis of his life in the event which we commemorate to-day. It is, perhaps, not superfluous to remark that the "wonderful conversion" of St. Paul is not

<sup>1</sup> *Dict. of Bible*, ed. Hastings, iii. 699.



seriously disputed in any quarter, though there is large difference of opinion as to the character of the experience thus described. Even those scholars who emphasise and, as it seems to me, exaggerate the discrepancies in detail between the accounts of the event given in the Acts, yet recognise in those accounts a core of historic fact, and connect them with the irresistible testimony of the Apostle himself in his undoubted epistles. Thus, to give but one example, Weizsäcker, who sees in the narratives in the Acts nothing more than "the conception formed of [the conversion] in the school of the Apostle," yet finds in the epistles conclusive evidence of the fact itself. "The Apostle's description of it," he says, "is not to be questioned. It is here mirrored in his consciousness, but it rests on facts. It is perfectly certain that no course of instruction by Apostles or Christians of any order preceded his conversion. It is certain that he persecuted the Christian Faith because he regarded it as incompatible with the maintenance of the law and of the traditions. It is also certain that it was a manifestation of Christ which first and of itself brought him to believe in Christ, and that this was not preceded by any preliminary stage of inclination towards the teaching of Jesus, or of



wavering between the two parties." "The only fact historically certain is that on the way to Damascus Paul witnessed this manifestation, and that he regarded it as a call from Christ and a proof of His resurrection."<sup>1</sup> This afternoon I shall rest content with this view, and ask you to seek the character and meaning of that "historically certain" fact only in the unimpeachable witness of St. Paul's epistles.

It is sufficiently evident that the crisis on the road to Damascus constituted the climax of a process of inward trouble which had long tortured the mind of the ardent and ambitious Pharisee. The nature of that process is discovered to view in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, which all students agree to regard as a chapter of self-description. Read thus, we are able to learn that Saul of Tarsus was passing through a spiritual experience, which, however in his case extraordinary by its intensity, is yet truly described as normal. I suspect that few of us who have reached middle life, and faced with any seriousness the problems of the soul, do not feel an intuitive and appropriating agreement with the confession of the Apostle. Just in proportion to men's spiritual depth do they

<sup>1</sup> *Apostolic Age*, i. 86, 92.



appreciate the inward conflict of will and appetite, which drove St. Paul to cry out in an agony of religious fear, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" Realise the circumstances under which the young Pharisee had to pass through this normal conflict. He had been brought up in the conviction that the ecclesiastical system of his race was Divinely ordered down to its least details of ceremonial observance, that in obedience to the Law lay the unfailing means of becoming righteous, that the gaining of righteousness was the proud prerogative of Israel and the passport to all the glorious privileges promised of old by the prophets. He was a zealous disciple of the Rabbis, and, in his own words, "advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of his own age among his countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers." That ardour of loyal expectation lightening the strain of punctilious obedience was doomed to disappointment. The Law did not justify its claims; the Divine-right system was strangely, bewilderingly inadequate to its own theory. It stated problems which it could not solve, stirred questions which it could not answer, aroused anxieties which it was powerless to allay. And



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as thus the Sacramental system of Judaism mocked the zealous Pharisee with delusive hopes, so the disillusionment seemed to react disastrously on his moral nature, and, by a portentous contradiction, the prime instrument of righteousness, the Divine Law itself, seemed to forfeit its character, and to become the parasite and ally of inherent sinfulness. "The commandment, which was unto life, this I found to be unto death: for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me." In the very heart of the Divine-right System, coincident with an exact fulfilment of all that orthodoxy could demand and zeal could render, the old, cruel, humbling fact emerged with luminous and threatening distinctness, that within himself he carried some deep-seated mischief beyond his own control, which no external system could correct or remove. "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not." This discovery of the moral impotence of the Law did certainly create in St. Paul's mind a certain resentment, which coloured his language, and, possibly, hindered him from being just to the system he had abandoned.

A distinguished Jewish scholar has recently



expressed with some vehemence his sense of the misrepresentation of Judaism, which, he says, is customary and almost universal among Christians. I hope some competent scholar will accept the challenge which Mr. Claud Montefiore has thrown down, and meet with the careful consideration it deserves the case he has advanced. Meanwhile we may frankly concede that there is reason in his protest against accepting St. Paul "as a correct critic of Judaism." "Do you consider," he asks justly, "that a convert from Liberalism to Toryism is the most adequate and impartial judge of the political system which he has abandoned? Is a convert from evangelical Protestantism to Roman Catholicism the best judge and critic of evangelical theology? Would you accept his evidence without cavil, and say that just because he abandoned the religion of his fathers for possibly a greater and fuller faith, he was the best possible critic and pathologist of the religion he has forsaken?"<sup>1</sup> I admit the justice of this protest, and I sympathise with the loyalty to his own ancient faith and illustrious race which inspires it, but I would point out to Mr. Montefiore that really the question is not between one religion and another,

<sup>1</sup> *Hibbert Lectures*, 1892, p. 542.



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but between the claims of an external system and the human spirit. St. Paul's experience, I venture to say, was truly to be called normal. Within the Christian Church the cry of anguish and disillusionment is continually heard; and the severity of St. Paul to the legal religion from which he had escaped has been renewed in the vehement contempt which a Luther or a George Fox has expressed for the ecclesiastical Christianity from which he had broken free. Let us, if you will, discount the antipathy in all cases; but let us not miss the lesson which all convey, and which has received its classic expression in the words of St. Paul.

The conviction that no external system could meet his case, that nothing less than emancipation from the flesh, the gift of a spiritual life under spiritual conditions were needed, was encountered by the sudden demonstration that to such a life of liberty and glory One had been raised "through the grave and gate of death." What Christ was perceived to be, that Christ's brethren in the human family might become. Here was the dream of moral freedom in the spiritual sphere realized. By a supreme venture of faith the Pharisee rises from his despair to appropriate as his own the new hope, born into his soul



at that moment of ecstasy. So the confession of spiritual repose follows directly on that of spiritual conflict: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death."

The suddenness of St. Paul's conversion was, in truth, less real than apparent. For that inward process of disillusionment which found its natural climax in the dramatic transition, as by one decisive stroke, from an extreme Judaistic orthodoxy to the widest Christian universalism, was concealed from the world's knowledge, perhaps even, in some measure, from his own knowledge, by a more than commonly vehement zeal. Just as conviction in the old creed waned and died within him, so did he resist the acknowledgment of the fact, avert his eyes from it with an almost desperate resolution, and strive to disprove it by extravagant exhibitions of his own zeal. However we regard the narrative which the author of the Acts puts into the Apostle's mouth, it is certain that it expresses with exact fidelity and dramatic power the character of the interior conflict which preceded the crisis of conversion. The resistance to the Divine coercion could not be better described than in the words of the



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uncharitable to say of such "conversions" that they lack adequate seriousness? There is no reason whatever for supposing that the clergy are, in this respect, markedly inferior to the laity. The melancholy fact is that there is a low standard of religious responsibility among us, and it finds expression in the levity with which men pass from one Church to another, as their preferences lead them. If anything could restrain us from a light view of religious transition, if anything could recall us to a worthy standard of religious responsibility, it would be a careful and serious study of St. Paul's conversion.

What anguish preceded, what suffering followed, that crisis of spiritual change! Read the 3rd chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, and you will learn what the decision to be obedient to the heavenly vision meant to St. Paul. There had come to him, as there comes always to men of his type, the hardest trial of all—the insult of obloquy, the pain of being misunderstood. In the blindness of malice his enemies distorted his motives, and denied his sincerity. Wherever he went, his footsteps were dogged by open calumny and secret innuendo. So he was driven to the distasteful and humbling necessity of self-defence. You may read his *Apologia pro Vita sua* in two chapters of his epistles—the 3rd of that



to the Philippians, and the 11th of the second to the Corinthians. It comes to this; St. Paul confutes the charges of instability and insincerity by showing what, as a matter of fact, his conversion had meant for him at the time, and what it had meant for him in the years that followed. His had been no frivolous choice; he had not lightly left his ancestral Church; nay, he had freely and frankly given himself to her service, tested her at every point, and only then, when her failure was forced on him by the imperious hunger of his soul, did he turn from her temple-gate to follow the Nazarene. "If any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the Church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ." There, in that dear, Divine Name, lay the whole answer to every question. St. Paul's emotion overcomes him whenever he names his Lord. The passion of love kindled in that ever-memorable moment when, as it seemed to him, the eyes of Jesus looked full into his eyes, and searched him as with the Searchlight of God, welled up again in his heart,

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and rushed from his lips in words of unconquerable affection.

Yea, thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning,  
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed :  
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,  
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.<sup>1</sup>

And thus the colour and tendency of St. Paul's ministry were determined by his "wonderful conversion." "To me to live is Christ" is the only formula adequate to explain that unparalleled career of service and suffering, and, as you know, it is his own. This conviction that he was one in mind, purpose, interest, hope with his Divine Master breathes courage into his witness, and awful fidelity, and unconquerable patience. He speaks with authority, for Christ speaks in him, and the power and grace of Christ rest on his message. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And the secret of St. Paul's extraordinary success as an apostle lay precisely in the fact that his ministry had its origin in a "wonderful conversion."

<sup>1</sup> *Saint Paul*, by F. W. H. Myers, p. 51.



For, on the one hand, he was himself a living and present demonstration of the central truth of his message. How persuasive, beyond all cogency of logic and art of rhetoric, is that personal touch added to the spoken word. "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief: howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Jesus Christ shew forth all His long-suffering, for an ensample of them which should hereafter believe on Him unto eternal life." And, on the other hand, St. Paul presented his many-sided Gospel in the true perspective. Always the core of his preaching, its staple and central theme, that to which all else was subsidiary and ministerial, was "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," "crucified through weakness yet living through the power of God," "born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead." The merely personal, merely official aspects of ministry—those aspects which have loomed so large in later times and now seem often to fill the whole horizon of Christian interest—fell, in his case, into the background. "For," he said, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ



Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." His vision of Christian truth was purged and rectified by his vision of Christ. Never to St. Paul could the merely secular, merely historic circumstances of the Incarnation obscure its profound and all-embracing significance. He who had seen the Divine Christ in His Glory—in whom it had pleased God, by a miracle of sovereign grace, "to reveal His Son"—could never sink his conception of the Master to the level of tradition, or bind his thought in the category of time. "Wherefore," he cries, "we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more." And, therefore, because the Christ of St. Paul is no conventional or contemporary Teacher, child of his own age, and prophet of his own race, but a Divine Person, in conscious contact with those who know and trust Him, drawing men to Himself with "bands of love," and sweetening the arduous ways of duty by the solaces of comradeship,—because the Christ of the Pauline Epistles is the Agent then and now of the one perpetual miracle of Christianity, which no scepticism can bring into doubt, and no materialism altogether ignore, the miracle of conversion, a living Master, magnanimous as masterful, who still, as then,



waylays men on the highways of error and crime, and arrests them with the vision of Himself, and saves them from their sins,—because, in truth, the Christ of St. Paul is the Christ whom we also can see, and love, and serve,—therefore, across the wastes of nearly two millenniums, the record of the “wonderful conversion” on the road to Damascus rings true to the Christian conscience, and strikes home to the Christian heart, and the words of the great Convert utter the ideal and confess the secret of all valid and prevailing Christian Ministry to the end of time. “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”



## XII

### THE FAITH THAT IS BLESSED<sup>1</sup>

JESUS SAITH UNTO HIM, BECAUSE THOU HAST SEEN ME, THOU HAST BELIEVED: BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET HAVE BELIEVED.—*St. John* xx. 29.

THE notion of "doubt" in the familiar modern sense of the word—the "honest doubt" in which the representative poet of our time said that there "lives more faith" than in "half the creeds"—is alien to the thought of the Old Testament. We are told that "the Hebrew of the Old Testament seems to lack an exact equivalent to our term 'doubt,' when used in a religious reference."<sup>2</sup> Elijah is, indeed, represented as, on a memorable occasion, challenging the verdict of his countrymen on the rival claims to their spiritual allegiance of Baal and Jehovah. "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow

<sup>1</sup> Preached in Westminster Abbey, December 21, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Hastings, *Dict. of Bible*, i. 618.



him." But this appeal implies no genuine distress of mind as to the legitimacy of either claim, but only the inherent absurdity of a divided obedience. The prophets battle with the incredulity of their contemporaries, but that incredulity always has its roots in flagitious conduct, never in genuine mental perturbation. The "men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil," against whom Zephaniah cries the sentence of a swift and certain destruction, were assuredly not troubled with the "obstinate questionings" which now harass the thoughtful and educated man, whether avowedly Christian or not, but were, like thousands of prosperous men who among ourselves accept a conventional creed which has no influence on their conduct, sunken in the practical atheism of self-indulgence. When we pass to the New Testament we find ourselves in another atmosphere. The paramount importance of faith is everywhere asserted. The demand of the Incarnate upon the generation which saw and heard Him, is summed up in the demand for faith. All spiritual graces implied in that heavenly enfranchisement which in Christ the Father bestows on men, are contingent on the presence in them of this quality. That absent, the



Incarnation is infertile of blessing, potent only for judgment. This faith, indeed, is not pre-eminently intellectual but moral, though the intellectual element is not absent. All that we mean by sympathy, insight, trust, self-surrender, is included in the faith of discipleship; the implied acceptance of revealed truth always seems rather a natural consequence of a relationship towards the Divine Master than a preliminary condition of that relationship, proposed on the one side, considered and fulfilled on the other. Men believed Christ's doctrine because they believed in Christ; they did not believe in Christ because they believed His doctrine. This indeed is properly involved in the notion of discipleship, for a disciple is not primarily one who knows but one who learns, and his distinctive act of faith is not in such and such doctrines but in the Teacher of his choice. Now, as faith is thus paramount in the New Testament, so we find that doubt (not, indeed, in its modern sense, but certainly in senses which approximate thereto) is prominent. "In the New Testament we meet with a series of terms which run through the shades of meaning expressed by our words, perplexity, suspense, distraction, hesitation, questioning, scepticism, shading down into unbelief."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hastings, *Dict. of Bible*, i. 618.



Even in the New Testament, however, I do not think that there is any suggestion of the kind of doubt with which we are familiar. The doubters of the Apostolic age were commonly, if not invariably, the advocates of moral license. They drew the inspiration of their unbelief from their own disordered lives ; they doubted in the interest, not of their own intellectual rectitude, but in that of their own base lusts. And, therefore, when we read the severe terms in which the Apostles invariably refer to them, we must be watchful to distinguish between erroneous opinions and flagitious practices associated with them. We may not carry over into the language of current Christianity the anathemas of the Apostles ; before we repeat them as applying to our own contemporaries, we must at least make sure that the old connection between error and vice has been reproduced by modern doubters, and that we, not less than the Apostles, are truly standing for essential righteousness. I do not question that there are still many whose vagaries of religious opinion are directly connected with their infidelities in the region of practice ; but I am very sure that doubt is now common among right-living men, and that it often reveals a moral sensitiveness beyond that of average believers, a sensitiveness which



resents the conventionalising of religious formulæ, which is conscious of a certain degradation in acquiescence, however expedient and even apparently inevitable, in professions which are in excess of conviction, and in formal religious acts which seem to imply more faith than one has. To such men the Apostolic anathemas have no reference and no relevance. It is all the more necessary that we should remember this in view of the fact, which is universally admitted, that Christianity, as it now presents itself to men for their acceptance, has an aspect, wonderfully unlike that which it bore in the days of the Apostles. I do not say that this is necessarily regrettable. In a certain sense it was inevitable that the Christian Society should follow the course of all human associations, and that the Divine Revelation of Truth, entrusted to its care, should be stereotyped in Creeds, developed by the ardours of worship and the practical necessities of work and conflict, and, in due course, systematised by the reflective intellect of the Church into elaborated theologies. To say that this has happened is both to confess and to justify much "honest doubt." For the law of historic development implies a recurrent process of repudiation and acquisition. There is no inherent stability, no perpetual worth,



no unquestionable authority about any secular embodiment of eternal truth. Secular it was ; born of the needs, shaped by the wisdom of the *sæculum*, or age, which produced it : this determined its worth, created its authority, secured its acceptance ; and this also provides its interpretation, and conditions its validity. But when one *sæculum*, or epoch, ends and another begins, then there falls upon the Church a time of restlessness, and upon individuals sore perplexity and trouble of mind. That this should happen seems to be implied in the very law which determines human progress, nay, to be enshrined in the very constitution of man. At no less cost can he learn and grow.

Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect  
 He could not, what he knows now, know at first :  
 What he considers that he knows to-day,  
 Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown ;  
 Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns  
 Because he lives, which is to be a man,  
 Set to instruct himself by his past self.<sup>1</sup>

In these intervals between creed-forming *sæcula* or epochs, to which may properly be given the name of transition times, the traditional and accepted statements of truth become increasingly unsatis-

<sup>1</sup> Browning, "A Death in the Desert."



factory. Thoughtful men cast about for some substitutes, but for these the times are not ripe, and, while they perforce wait, and question, their faith is subjected to a cruel strain, and sometimes, more often than not, they themselves are exposed to suspicions, equally unmerited and injurious. For the vested interests of the established tradition, the host of official teachers who are nothing more, the mass of the devout to whom religion is always mainly an affair of the emotions, the fanatical and the ambitious, both, though from opposite stand-points, concerned with the maintenance of the current system, all combine to resent, and, if possible, suppress, the attempt to set the truth free from expressions which have become obsolete, and to find for it fresh expressions which shall convey and elucidate what they profess to utter.

In a striking and characteristic letter written in the year 1807, that remarkable man, Mr. Alexander Knox, confided to Mrs. Hannah More some of his own religious experiences. In spite of the changes which have passed upon English Christianity, his words are curiously relevant to our own conditions. "It is my persuasion," he wrote, "that the subtle, paradoxical manner in which some of the most serious Christians, both now and heretofore, have



been accustomed to speak of justifying righteousness, of faith in Christ, and of acceptance before God, has been, and is, one of the greatest hindrances to the diffusion of true religion in the world, as well as to the growth of it in the individual. Still more, I do think that to dwell upon these ideas, as if they were prime truths of Christianity, is one of the greatest infatuations which could take possession of good men." He goes on to say that these notions had been much pressed upon him in his boyhood, and, when he began to think seriously, had cost him many a painful thought. Then his own heart told him that "the path of safety was simple and unequivocal ; that what God required was that which God alone could work, a new and spiritual nature." He gave up, therefore, "puzzling his mind with subtleties," and endeavoured to pour out his heart in prayer to God. "I saw," he says, "by degrees that the change of heart I was solicitous for, could not be brought about by any merely moral or philosophical contemplation of God ; but that I must obtain a lively, spiritual apprehension of God manifest in the flesh ; such as would effectually bow my heart to the self-denying yoke of Christ, and make me actually partake of His unworldly, unselfish, divinely pure spirit and temper." He adds



that "from the simplicity of this pursuit he had never found any reason to depart."<sup>1</sup> Alexander Knox was passing through an experience, common enough in times of religious transition. The current evangelical formulæ were worn out: instead of uttering Divine truth, they obscured it; to the ardent soul, asking for the bread of God, they brought only a dead stone of conventional orthodoxy. So, not without trepidation and distress of mind, he had to set all these aside, and get behind them to the very Truth itself. There, on his knees, face to face with God, he found faith and peace. Christ's beatitude was his. The obvious external aids to faith having failed him, he took the directer course, and winged a bolder flight. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Christ sets in contrast two kinds of faith—that which is reached through external authority, and that which has no such origin. St. Thomas believed because he thought he saw Christ risen from the dead. His faith was based on sensible experiences, culminating in his Vision in the Upper Room. Herein, of course, he was nowise distinguished from the rest of the Apostles. All of them had been gradually educated by their experiences into a belief in their Master as

<sup>1</sup> *Remains*, iii. 93-94.



the Messiah ; all had been overwhelmed with panic at the immense disaster of the Passion ; all had disbelieved the tidings of the Resurrection, until visions of the Redeemer had overcome their incredulity. St. Thomas had, for some unknown reason, been absent from the company of the Apostles on Easter Day, and had consequently missed the convincing Christophany which had transmuted their despair into ardent faith. Against their enthusiastic affirmations he cried his dolorous protest, the very energy of which discovered the anguish of his heart : " Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." That crude, rigorous, physical test of the alleged fact runs in his mind and rushes to his lips naturally enough, for the uneducated Jews of that time seem to have had no other notion of resurrection than that of bodily resuscitation ; indeed, the contemporary *Apocalypse of Baruch* declares that the dead will rise possessing every defect and deformity they had at the moment of death, and this strange notion entered the Christian Church and long persisted there.<sup>1</sup> And, as naturally, when the Vision of the

<sup>1</sup> *Apocalypse of Baruch*, ed. Charles, pp. 81-83 ; also Dr. Charles's *Jowett Lectures on Eschatology*, p. 280.



risen Christ was vouchsafed to Thomas also, this feature was preserved. He saw his Master as he thought he ought to see Him, satisfying to the full the requirements of his reason, giving him the proofs he demanded, winning from him the amplest confession of faith which the New Testament contains. But in the wake of his new conviction followed necessarily a certain consciousness of shame. Why had he been so slow to believe, so exacting in his requirements? He catches a look of reproach in the Master's Face, and hears a Beatitude which for him is also a censure. "Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Let me observe in passing that the antithesis in the text is not between a reasonable and an unreasonable faith. It was pointed out as long ago as the sixth century by Primasius, Bishop of Adrumetum, that St. Thomas's profession of faith went far beyond the evidence of the crude test he proposed. "*A mortali enim homine divinitas videri non potest,*" "Divinity cannot be inferred from a mortal man." In seeking to demonstrate to himself that the risen Christ was still what He had been before He "passed through the grave and gate of death," the Apostle



was not really gaining a reasonable basis for his creed. But his heart was sounder than his logic, and his faith had deeper roots than he knew. "Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God."<sup>1</sup>

And now, perhaps, we may well ask why the faith which is gained without the aid of vision is declared by Christ to be, in a special and superior sense, "blessed." Perhaps there are at least four reasons which we may distinguish and appreciate.

Faith based on vision must be a very dependent thing, dependent on reminiscence, and, therefore, naturally tending to decline as reminiscence fades. There is a popular saying which, after the manner of popular sayings, enshrines a truth of average life. "Seeing is believing," we say; and that is so far true that the evidence of sight, of the senses, is for the moment the most convincing of all evidences, and creates the completest confidence. But, then, there is another truth, equally supported by common experience, which balances and, in a measure, neutralises the other. "Out of sight, out of mind," we say, and this also is true. The confidence which vision, the testimony of the senses, creates,

<sup>1</sup> I owe the quotation from Primasius to Bishop Westcott; vide *Hebrews*, p. 351.



requires for its sustenance that that testimony shall be continually renewed. Cut it off from this, its source, and, like the stream whose fountain is choked, it wanes and fails. The faith of the Apostles was, in the first instance, built upon the evidence of their senses, and that evidence became, after the withdrawal of Christ's visible Presence, a matter of memory. They lived in the past, which was for ever precious as a treasury of reminiscence, tender, moving, and most holy, upon which they were always drawing for comfort and guidance, to which their thoughts naturally turned at every juncture of perplexity and trial. With their converts the case was different. They had never, in St. Paul's phrase, "known Christ after the flesh." Discipleship for them, therefore, was essentially and consciously an affair of the conscience, not of the memory. The Christ they owned and loved was not a dear, sacred Figure of an ever more distant past, but a present Lord, with whom they were able even in the world to hold spiritual fellowship, most sweet and most helpful. It seems to me that we may catch a note of wonder in the language of the Apostles when they speak of this spiritual love for Christ which, in their converts, had no roots in historic experiences. St. Peter, for example, dwells on the absence of



vision in the case of the Asiatic Christians to whom he wrote, and who, none the less, loved Christ fervently: "Whom not having seen ye love: on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Then the faith that is based on vision is likely to be inferior in quality as well as in power of permanence; for vision, the evidence of the senses, can only bring into prominence the lower aspects of the truth. "The things which are seen are temporal: but the things which are not seen are eternal." Every human life has a setting of circumstances in which it is seen, an embroidery of associations by which it is remembered, and these at once reveal and obscure the life itself. There was no exception in His case, who was, pre-eminently, the "Son of man"; and the Apostles must have been more than human if they had been able at once and without effort to emancipate themselves from the dominion of these lower features of their Master's Self-manifestation. It is thought, not without reason, that not the least force behind that obstinate legalism, against which St. Paul fought and won his great battle for Christian liberty, was, precisely, the perverted loyalty of those con-



temporaries of the Lord, who, like St. Thomas, had seen and believed, and who held themselves bound to maintain jealously the perpetual obligation of His Example, in respect to the observances of the Jewish system. Within the Christian Church the same narrow legalism has crept into the study of the records of Christ's life on earth. The "Imitatio Christi" has been degraded into a painful effort to reproduce as closely as possible the external aspects and conditions of the Master's Life. No doubt the tradition of Christianity has been enriched by winning Sainthoods, but the materialising error has neutralised the romantic beauty. St. Paul's confession remains to the Church as the very principle of a study of the Incarnate Life, which shall be both reverent and rational, an aid to worship and a guide to work: "We henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more."

Once more, faith based on vision makes a minimum demand on the individual, and therefore its moral effect is comparatively slight. "Seeing is believing" is only not a formula of scepticism. A faith which is based on external authority, whether of miracles or of the Church or of the senses, is in itself a poor thing. We come almost to Coleridge's distinction



between faith and belief. The one is the allegiance of the man himself; the other is properly external to him. The two are not necessarily connected; they may go altogether apart. This explains the moral unsatisfactoriness of a theological education, and the curious compatibility of orthodoxy and unrighteousness. "Faith is subjective," said Coleridge. "I throw myself in adoration before God; acknowledge myself His creature—simple, weak, lost; and pray for help and pardon through Jesus Christ; but when I rise from my knees, I discuss the doctrine of the Trinity as I would a problem in geometry: in the same temper of mind, I mean, not by the same process of reasoning, of course."<sup>1</sup> Not the least spiritual believers have thought that faith suffers when formal belief is isolated, formulated, and enforced. Thus Dr. Hort, writing in the freedom of private correspondence, did not scruple to confess his fear that "in England the Trinity seemed to have become the merest dogma," and that "it had been killed by that hapless Quicunque Vult, and its substitution of geometry for life."<sup>2</sup> How weak a hold this kind of faith based on external authority may have upon men, is obvious enough to us who

<sup>1</sup> *Table Talk*, 3rd edition, 1851, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Hort's *Life and Letters*, ii. 140.



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live in such a city as London, filled as it is with renegades from all the Churches, and from all the Creeds, to whom the doubts and distractions and disillusionments of urban life have brought the destruction of their poor little fabrics of conventional religion, whose fragile faith could not survive the parting from the external conditions out of which it had grown. In measure, you may see the same in every great town, and conspicuously in the colonies, and beyond the frontiers of Christian civilisation.

Finally, the faith that is based on vision is a very narrow kind of faith, a faith which—as it depends upon personal experiences necessarily incommunicable to others, and, in the case of those who possess them, varying almost infinitely in their evidential worth, that which is complete proof to one man being almost no proof at all to another—is a private thing, neither interpreted by, nor interpreting, the general experience, incapable therefore of being greatly serviceable to others. It helps us little when we are told of conversions, miraculous in all but name, which seem to be rather portents than types. If we had undergone such extraordinary experiences, we say, we might well have been also converted ; but for us faith must be attainable along the lines of commonplace living, or not at all. And



that faith is so attainable seems to me to be the promise implied in Christ's "last and greatest Beatitude," "the peculiar heritage of the later Church"—"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"; to whom, that is, faith has come with no other testimonies than those of its own deep reasonableness, who have been led to know of the doctrine in the way of obedience, according to Christ's promise, and who have their confidence not in anything external but deep within themselves: "Christ in them, the hope of glory." Such faith stands firm when theologies grow obsolete and churches totter to their ruin, for it draws its life from no earthly fountains, but from the everlasting hills. "Because I live ye shall live also" is a promise which carries the assurance of its own fulfilment. For Christ lives, and shall live for ever; and the one perpetual and impregnable evidence of the Faith of Discipleship is the fact, confessed on the grand arena of the general life of the Christian Society, recognised in the personal experience of every genuine Christian, that Christ is in touch with His own, hearing, helping, hallowing them. This faith dares speak in terms of knowledge, and its creed rings still with the old Apostolic certitude: "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath



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given us an understanding, that we know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ."

Our souls go too much out of self  
Into ways dark and dim :  
'Tis rather God who seeks for us,  
Than we who seek for Him.

To think of Him as by our side  
Is almost as untrue,  
As to remove His throne beyond  
Those skies of starry blue.

So all the while I thought myself  
Homeless, forlorn, and weary,  
Missing my joy, I walked the earth  
Myself God's sanctuary.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faber, "The Starry Skies."



### XIII

## THE EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION<sup>1</sup>

LAST OF ALL, AS UNTO ONE BORN OUT OF DUE TIME, HE APPEARED TO ME ALSO.—1 *Corinthians* xv. 8.

THE Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has always been regarded as the corner-stone of the fabric of Christian belief; and it certainly has from the first been offered by the missionaries of Christianity as the supreme demonstration of the truth which in that capacity they are charged to proclaim. The more carefully we reflect on the matter, the more we shall be convinced that in thus staking everything on the fact of the Lord's Resurrection the Church has acted wisely. Indeed, ought we not rather to say that she had no option? Her own existence grew from the message of the Resurrection, and she remains the most impressive witness to its truth. Every

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Easter Day, April 3, 1904, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



year as Easter comes, Christians all over the world reaffirm the declaration which first Apostles proclaimed, and challenge their non-Christian neighbours to take account of their creed, and bring it to the test of inquiry. We all know that, from the start of Christian history, the Gospel of the Resurrection has been encountered by unbelief, and I am very sure that there is none of my hearers who is not conscious of the fact that, in our own age and country, the objections of unbelievers are pressed with something more than the old confidence, and, perhaps, something more than the old plausibility. We can hardly avoid the question, urged on us from many sides, Why do I believe in the fact of Christ's Resurrection? Of course, on such an occasion as this, the Christian preacher could not usefully attempt any detailed statement of the reasons, cogent and sufficient reasons as we think, on which our conviction is based, and I certainly have no design of the kind in my thoughts this morning; but I think it may be helpful to some of us if I try to clear away some misconceptions, and to indicate the true character of the Christian belief.

The text, which must serve as the peg on which to hang my propositions, is itself of remarkable importance. St. Paul is recalling to the minds of the Corinthians the reasons which he himself had



given as bearing out the message of Christ's Resurrection. There are broadly three reasons, or kinds of reasons, which he advances.

First of all, like the orthodox Israelite he was, alike by birth and by education, he adduces the fulfilment of prophecy : " He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Probably St. Paul had in mind the passage in Hosea, which is still read in our churches as the lesson for Easter Eve : " After two days will he revive us : on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him." You will remember also that St. Matthew states that, when pressed by the Pharisees, Christ had said that no sign should be given to them save the sign of Jonah the prophet, which He interpreted as foretelling that the Son of man should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. This proof from the fulfilment of prophecy had the highest place in the apologetics of the first Christians, and we hardly now can understand its effectiveness. The Corinthians were, indeed, Gentiles, but it is evident, both from the record of their conversion and from St. Paul's epistles, that they were familiar with the Jewish Scriptures.

In the next place, the Apostle offered a list of six appearances of Christ after His death and burial : " He appeared to Cephas : then to the twelve : then



He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep : then He appeared to James : then to all the apostles : and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, He appeared to me also." We can hardly be mistaken in regarding this list of Christophanies as having something of the authority of an official statement. It has often been pointed out that the successive appearances are apparently selected and arranged on some plan, and, if any historical character at all be recognised in the evangelical narratives, it is clear that St. Paul omitted the appearances to the women, to Mary Magdalen, and to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Moreover, the Apostle, in classing his own "vision" of the risen Saviour on the road to Damascus with the other Christophanies, allows us to conclude that in all the appearances there was nothing of the nature of a resuscitated body, which could be touched, held, handled, and could certify its frankly physical character by eating and drinking, but always the vision of the Christ in glory, flashing wondrously on the spiritual eyesight, and coming and going through all material barriers in the perfect liberty of supra-physical life. It seems plain to my thinking that, with the Pauline list of Christophanies before us, we



are justified in thinking that the earliest statements of the Apostles on the Resurrection emphasised the glorified life of the Crucified Lord, and made no mention of those materialistic details which were gradually built up into the narratives which have sunk so deeply into the mind of Christendom.

St. Paul adds yet a third proof to those of prophecy fulfilled and Christophanies recorded. He bids the Corinthians take account of the moral effects which had followed both in his own case and in theirs from the conviction that Christ had indeed overcome death. "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am : and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain : but I laboured more abundantly than they all : yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Whether then it be I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed."

Such, then, were the grounds on which men first were asked to believe the Gospel of the Resurrection. After the lapse of nearly nineteen centuries, in this modern world so changed in manner of thinking and in range of thought, so burdened with accumulated information, which it mistakenly calls knowledge, so perplexed with the problems of its own civilisation,



how stands the case? Do the reasons which satisfied the Corinthians satisfy us? Look again at them and try to appraise their worth. Probably we are not now much impressed by that appeal to the Old Testament which the first Christians found so persuasive; indeed, it would hardly be excessive to say that to the modern student the clause "according to the Scriptures," which St. Paul twice introduces into his statement, rather weakens than strengthens its claim on our acceptance. It discloses a possibility of mental bias, which, however unconscious and inevitable, may none the less have tampered perilously with the tradition of the vital facts. Yet, though I could not honestly press the Apostolic appeal to the Old Testament, it seems to me that that appeal has rather changed its form than lost its validity, or perhaps, to speak more exactly, has lost its force on the narrow plane on which it was originally advanced only to acquire larger force on another and wider plane. Extend your definition of the Scriptures until they include the whole spiritual literature of mankind, all the records, written and unwritten, which utter the deep yearnings of the human spirit, and you will find that they may not be unfitly described as one many-sided prophecy of the Resurrection. In every age and in every nation we can trace, if we will, the



pathetic protest against the empire of death, and hear the faltering confessions of the human heart's unconquerable belief that, in spite of all adverse appearances,

For all the death, the darkness, and the curse  
Of this dim universe,  
Needs a solution full of love must be.<sup>1</sup>

Increasingly we are being led to understand that Christianity, the Religion of the Incarnation, gathers up into its witness all the whole spiritual movement of the race, and that no part of man's hardly-gathered treasure of truth must be renounced on the threshold of Christ's Church. So into the old Christian appeal to prophecy fulfilled we may pour profounder and more abiding validity, and base our belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the wide and deep foundation of its congruity with the higher aspirations of mankind.

When we pass to the argument based on the appearances of the Risen Christ to His followers, we enter at once the region of acute modern controversy ; yet here I venture humbly to maintain that the Apostolic reasoning retains validity. History certifies the fact of the Resurrection to-day as clearly as it ever could do so. The reality of the appearances

<sup>1</sup> Trench, "On an Early Death."



of the Risen Christ to the Apostles remains unshaken by the searching criticism of the documents. What precisely was the nature of those appearances is a question beyond the province of history : we may fairly claim that evidences multiply of a closer relationship between the physical and the spiritual than the older rationalists allowed ; that among those who have a right to be called men of science there is an increasing willingness to reserve judgment on these phenomena, in which there is an interaction of the physical with another factor, which we call spiritual ; that we are obeying the dictates of reason, not less than serving the interests of our religion, when we refuse to deny what we cannot understand. No doubt there is much in the primitive accounts of the Resurrection which is demonstrably unhistorical ; but that is not the case with the evidence of St. Paul. The Apostolic Church may be compared to a child striving to describe some astonishing experience. The childish vocabulary is too limited, the childish intelligence is too undeveloped, to dispense with the aid of the childish imagination ; and the story which the child succeeds in telling certifies by its embellishment the great impression made on the childish mind. We do not judge those to be wise persons who sweep aside the whole story as without foundation because



forsooth it contains manifest inaccuracy. So with the early accounts of Christ's Resurrection. A man of great spiritual genius like St. Paul fastened at once on the central truth implied in the Apostolic message. The Resurrection was to his mind an apocalypse of life, the final proof of the inherent superiority of the spiritual over the natural, the pledge of victory over death in the case of all who lived the life of the Spirit, the inspiration of moral effort. The Resurrection is constantly referred to in the Pauline epistles as a fact in the experience of all who, as believers, are mystically united to the Risen Lord. As a characteristic teaching of St. Paul on this subject, the Epistle for Easter Day will at once recur to your minds: "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." Lesser men, children of a materialistic age, described the Resurrection, as alone they could describe it, in the grosser terms of contemporary thought; and so we find, side by side with the spiritual language of St. Paul, other language of a very different description. It may well be the case that the idea of Resurrection could lay hold on the popular mind only under the form of carnal resuscitation. The tradition of Christianity has certainly fastened on the more materialistic statements



of the Scriptures, and woven them into literature and liturgy ; but now when, under the pressure of an exacter science of testimony, and of a more sensitive conscience, we re-examine our documents, it is surely no mean confirmation of the Truth of the original Message that in its earliest form it was free from the elements which most awaken the repugnance of thoughtful and reverent thinkers. We can still say with St. Paul, "Now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep," because the Apostle also says with us, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."

Finally, there is the appeal to the moral effect of the conviction that Christ lives. Here at least the lapse of time, so far from weakening, has immensely strengthened the Apostolic argument. The case for the Resurrection grows stronger with every Easter. Christian experience has been continuous, and always on a vaster scale, until to-day there is hardly any part of the habitable universe which lies altogether beyond the reach of St. Paul's appeal. The Corinthians were confronted by the morally-suggestive spectacle of those enthusiasts who, in the strength of their conviction that their crucified Master was living and active in their midst, faced all risks, endured all hard-



ships, even laid down their lives. The Gospel they preached in Christ's Name went home to the consciences of their hearers, and, as they gave themselves up to its control, they in turn became sharers in the same astonishing power. So the proofs of the Resurrection multiplied as one after another men were able, each one for himself, to adopt St. Paul's declaration, and in a most true sense to say, "Last of all, He appeared to me also." Now this process of authentication in personal experiences has gone on ever since, until the vast tradition of Christian Sainthood has become what we know it to be, a line of ever-broadening light spanning the sixty generations which have come and gone since first the Message of Christ's Resurrection was proclaimed. This evidence of our Christian Faith is always fresh and sufficient, for we have it in the present, and we have it each one for himself.

"Christ lives, for He works still," is Bishop Westcott's terse and suggestive summary of the "proof" of the Resurrection. "Christ in you, the hope of glory," is the kindred formula of St. Paul. Christianity is gathered up in this Creed of Life: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."



That faith gives meaning to our Eucharist, and makes it a true bond of fellowship; for plainly, if Jesus lives, then our service to-day is no mere pathetic pageant of commemoration, but an act in which He Himself takes part. The "comfortable words" are not only sweet echoes from a sacred but always remoter past, but a message from a present Lord: "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." "Jesus lives," and in Him live those whom we thankfully remember here, the host of all Christ's servants departed this life in His faith and fear. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him." Here we recover touch with our dear ones gone from sight and sound—

Under the thin partition that is spread—  
The thin partition of thin earth—between  
The living and the dead;<sup>1</sup>

for here they and we are wondrously united in the Lord of Life Himself.

Here, surely, we are at one among ourselves. Against the sacred magic of this Feast of Love even the hardest Christians melt into gentleness. "Let this

<sup>1</sup> Trench, "The Monk and Bird."



cup be the cup of reconciliation between us," said the mundane and quarrelsome Warburton as he stooped to minister the chalice to his old enemy Dean Tucker, with whom, it is said, he had not been on speaking terms for years;<sup>1</sup> and indeed, when we think of this Sacrament as being indeed the Lord's Supper, the appointed trysting-place of the Lord and His servants, whom He calls His friends, it is apparent that this is the very Sign and Pledge of Christian fellowship. You are not treating the Holy Communion rightly if you ever forget this, and suffer yourself (under whatever pretences) to treat the Lord's Supper as a private possession of your own Church. Christians as such, in no lower capacity, must draw near to this Holy Table, "seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body; for we all partake of the one bread."

<sup>1</sup> Mark Pattison, *Essays*, vol. ii. pp. 159-160 [Oxford, 1889].



## XIV

### THE MORAL POWER OF CHRIST AN EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION <sup>1</sup>

AND THEY THAT ARE OF CHRIST JESUS HAVE CRUCIFIED THE FLESH  
WITH THE PASSIONS AND THE LUSTS THEREOF.—*Galatians* v. 24.

THE familiarity of these words makes it hard for us either to realize their extraordinary character, or to bring them into any coherent relation with our ordinary conduct. Consider them for a few minutes, merely in themselves, and see what they imply as to the writer's attitude towards a contemporary of his own who but a few years before had been publicly executed on a charge of treason. The Epistle to the Galatians is not seriously in dispute respecting its authorship by St. Paul ; and its date is universally ascribed to the earlier period of the Apostle's literary career. Indeed, it has been recently argued with much force that it is the earliest of the extant

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 27, 1903, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



Pauline epistles, "antedating by some two years the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians, which is commonly regarded as the oldest that we have."<sup>1</sup>

For our present purpose the precise year of its composition matters little. It suffices to point to the broad fact that within some twenty-five years of the Crucifixion, such words as those before us were written to religious communities in Galatia, and, as we are bound to assume, were intelligible to them. We hear much, and we shall hear much more, of Biblical Criticism ; the documents of the New Testament, notably the Gospels, will be shown to us under strange aspects ; and, as we see them dissected and discussed by critical students so absorbed in their task that they tend to forget its religious connections, there is some risk of our taking the impression that the historic foundations of our belief are giving way. As a corrective of that despondent disposition, I think there is nothing better than to take some undisputed fact and quietly think out its significance. In the main I believe that Biblical Criticism, just in proportion to its freedom from religious suspicion and ecclesiastical hostility, rises above the prejudices which have given it, not altogether without cause, a bad name with Christian folk, and does yeoman

<sup>1</sup> M'Giffert's *Hist. of Ap. Age*, p. 229.



service to the truth. And the attainment of truth must be the interest of Christianity, which is essentially and professedly the religion of truth. Whatever is untrue cannot be Christian ; and whatever is Christian can have no higher title to our acceptance than that it is true. Biblical Criticism, in so far as it is genuinely scientific in method and temper, is an instrument for reaching truth, and therefore a handmaid of the Christian faith. I say this in order at once to disavow for myself any sympathy with that attitude of vigilant suspicion, and even hostility, which too commonly stands revealed in the language of Christian men, whenever Biblical Criticism comes under discussion. But while this, I hope, is quite plain, there can be no risk of misconception on the part of the most sensitive critic, if I admit that there exists, and not without apparent justifications, a real anxiety among Christian folk as to the effect and tendency of criticism, and if I keep that anxiety in view as I preach.

In the Epistle to the Galatians we have a document, which scientific criticism authorises us to accept as being, indeed, what it claims to be, and what we have been taught to believe it to be—a writing of Paul the Apostle addressed to communities of Christians in Galatia somewhere about twenty-five years after the Crucifixion of Christ. I shall ask you



to examine with me the passage from the epistle from which the text is taken, and which is effectively summed up in the text; and I shall ask you to agree to the conclusion that nothing less than the fact of the Resurrection can account for the remarkable situation discovered to view.

“And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.” The expressions are so extraordinary that we cannot but seek some explanation. “Christ Jesus” is a name which carries a world of suggestions. We all know that among the Jews of that age there was a strong conviction, based on the prophetic Scriptures, that the redemption of the Nation drawing in its train the “restoration of all things” would be effected by One in whom would be combined all the descriptions of power, wisdom, and patience which their sacred literature contained. “The Christ,” or “Anointed One,” filled the horizon of patriotic and religious Jews. Here is this title, so rich in suggestions, summing up in itself the faith of a whole people, not only given to the crucified Jesus, but given so securely and so habitually as to have become merged in His Name. It is no longer an official title, it has been absorbed in a personal description. Within twenty-five years of His execution at Jerusalem



amid the jeers of a multitude, which was scandalised by His claim to be the Christ, we find Him venerated as Christ by Jews and Gentiles alike.

But, astonishing as this is, it is yet more astonishing that the Crucified should be spoken about as evidently living, and not only living, but owning men, who believe on Him. "They that are of Christ Jesus"—"Christ Jesus' folk"—the description clearly carries associations of love and pride. It is as if St. Paul said, "They that love Christ Jesus and pride themselves on belonging to Him." We know that such sentiments did underlie the adoption of the name "Christian," by which Christ's followers at a very early period designated themselves. That name, according to the writer of the Acts, was of pagan coinage—"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"—but, even so, the name is no less suggestive of devotion to Christ, for we may be sure that the pagans of Antioch seized hold of the most conspicuous feature of the new sectaries, and that was precisely the emphasis they laid on Christ's ownership of them. If it be the case, as some modern scholars hold, that the Epistle to the Galatians was actually written at Antioch, then we may, perhaps, recognise in the text a reference to the new name which was on men's lips in the great



Syrian capital. "They that are of Christ Jesus"—*i.e.* they that rightly are called Christians, they that have any valid claim to the character which the pagans of Antioch attribute to disciples,—“have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.” I am the more confident in recognising in St. Paul’s phrase an unexpected but perceptible appeal to the love which the Galatians bare to Christ, since I find that St. Peter in an epistle addressed to these very Galatians expressly dwells on their affection for a Master Whom with their own eyes they had never seen: “Whom,” he says, “not having seen ye love; on Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” If I appear to dwell with undue length on a point which may seem to require no emphasis, it is because to my mind the love of the Galatian converts to Christ Jesus is of even greater evidential weight than the love of St. Paul, in whose experience we can discover the elements out of which an enthusiasm of devotion could arise; or than the love of St. Peter, who was personally bound to Christ by a thousand moving and tender memories of common life.

And what is St. Paul’s definition of a Christian, which he can count upon as sure to be accepted by



the Galatians? "They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof." We are carried at once into the heart of Pauline Christianity ; and, in order to bring out fully and accurately the meaning of that "crucifixion of the flesh" which the Apostle holds to be inseparable from discipleship, we should have to undertake a careful examination of his epistles, a matter, of course, too considerable for the present occasion. Nor, indeed, for my present argument is it necessary ; for we are concerned not with the Pauline theology as such, but with the testimony to Christ, which so much of it as is gathered into the text implies. And herein two points stand out conspicuously. On the one hand, the Crucifixion of Christ is constantly dwelt upon as, in some way, having an abiding and universal moral significance ; and, on the other hand, discipleship is constantly assumed to involve the moral agreement of the disciple with Christ, or, to state the same thing from another point of view, Christ is always made the embodiment of the Ideal of human conduct, and the energy by which that Ideal is pursued and approached.

It is no part of my present purpose to touch on the thorny and disputed subject of the Atonement, considered as a theory, but I ask you to note, and



reflect upon, the implications of such language as the following, which, not leaving the narrow limits of our epistle, we have at hand to illustrate the text. Is it conceivable that if the shameful tragedy of the Crucifixion had had no sequel such as the Gospels relate, this language could have been held about it within a few years? Take the opening salutation: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world." Or take this amazing personal confession: "I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live: and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." Finally, take that ardent passage at the end of the epistle: "Far be it from me to glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Perhaps, so far as the writer of these passages is concerned, some would maintain that, at most, they indicate his profound conviction of the truth of Christ's Resurrection, and, for the rest, show the mental process by which he correlated that conviction with the facts of Christ's actual history on the one hand, and with his own



eloquently did Dean Church describe the expression in mankind of the deep contradiction which the Apostle declares. St. Paul could assume the agreement of the Galatians when he set out in vivid contrast "the works of the flesh" and "the fruit of the Spirit." Those works were, as he said, "manifest"; and against that "fruit" there was no law. Both were clear in their contrasted character to the conscience of men as such. And certainly, when the Apostle forewarned these Galatians that "the kingdom of God" was closed against those who "fulfilled the lust of the flesh," he would not have been unintelligible, or seemed irrational. So far, at least, he could carry them with him; but when he went beyond that and required them to identify the crucified Jesus with their own higher selves, and to find, in owning Him as their Master, the most binding obligation to be loyal to their own consciences; nay more, when he bade them believe that when Jesus died on the Cross the power of the flesh was destroyed for all who believed in Him, and that the Crucified was henceforward a present energy of righteousness, accessible to them,—then St. Paul had nothing to commend so amazing a doctrine to their acceptance except its own attractiveness and congruity with their spiritual yearnings. And these



might explain acceptance, but could not possibly justify it. If there had been nothing in St. Paul's message, experience would speedily have disproved its pretensions, but that precisely is what this epistle shows did not happen. Years have passed since the Galatians believed; the theory of a living Christ Who makes men morally strong has been tested by them in practice, and the result is so certain that it has passed into the number of their religious postulates. "They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof." No doubt it was St. Paul's habit to speak in ideal terms: we have but to read this epistle in order to see that the Galatians were far indeed from having effectually mastered their sinful passions and lusts: the Apostle describes as an accomplished fact what was in truth still in the course of being accomplished; but he could not have written as he does if he could not count upon the agreement of his readers. The Galatians were indeed very far from being what Christians ought to be; but they knew that Christians they were, and that, because they were Christians, they were on a morally ascending course, and that the principle of moral ascent was the Spirit of the living Christ. And we must remember as we read St. Paul's words to-day that

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abyss of time, but it would have survived, as the literature of the ancients has survived, to adorn and enrich the leisure of students. Mere beauty, mere pathos, even moral excellence, could not have secured to the little biographies of the New Testament their unique power to fascinate and influence mankind. No : it was because men knew in their own personal experience, and were confirmed in their knowledge by the ever-waxing testimonies of others, that Jesus Christ was in their midst, a present Master, Comrade, Friend, that they so eagerly read and so reverently treasured the memorials of His Life on Earth. Thus the Gospels are themselves in some sense standing proofs of the Resurrection, and they have the pledges of perpetual supremacy deep in the hearts of Christian folk. Too often men speak as if we believed in Christ merely on the evidence of the New Testament ; but that is reversing the true order : rather, we believe in the New Testament on the evidence of Christ. Not in the past, but in the present, is the proof of the Resurrection ; we serve a King who lives and reigns now on the earth, and our Teacher speaks still intelligibly to His own.

Not only through Christ long since, and the teachers of ages  
gone,  
But to-day He speaks, day by day, to those who are toiling on ;



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More clear perhaps then, to the ear, and with nigher voice and more plain,  
But still the same Teacher Divine, speaking to us again and again.

“Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace”—runs the prophet’s message—“whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee”: and that is just the message for all who, in times of unsettlement like ours, are disposed to grow fearful, and to lose heart, because there is change in the air, and the old pilot-stars of faith seem failing from the sky. Stay your mind on the living Master Himself, and trust in Him, Who is evermore the same, and you need not disturb yourself about what men speak of as the perils of Religion. So long as you turn to Christ in temptation and are strengthened; so long as you find in Christ a continual rebuke of evil, a continual summons to good; so long as in trying to act on His principles and to follow in His steps you know yourself to be rising above your lower nature, and becoming humbler and more serviceable; so long, in fact, as you have assurance in yourself that Christ is with you, what need have you to be distressed at the babble of the multitude and the conflicts of the schools? You also may say, “I know Him whom I have believed,” and in that “knowledge” you may rest in



peace. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, and though the mountains be moved in the hearts of the seas ; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. . . . The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge."



### III







## XV

### THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

AND JESUS, FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, RETURNED FROM THE JORDAN, AND WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT IN THE WILDERNESS DURING FORTY DAYS, BEING TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL.—*St. Luke iv. 1.*

THE author of the Epistle to the Hebrews states with notable emphasis that our Saviour's temptations were in no respect different from those by which we are assailed ; and he builds on this identity of trial the comfortable assurance of Christ's sympathy with us. We are, therefore, authorised to make our temptations the key to the understanding of His, and to seek in our own experience the commentary on the story of His Life.

If it be asked whether the record of Christ's temptation be miraculous, the answer cannot be doubtful. Temptation in His case was as natural and as supernatural as in ours ;—natural, for the

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Passion Sunday, March 29, 1903, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



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very constitution of that human nature which is common to Him and to us requires temptation as the condition of development, suffering as the means and instrument of perfection ; supernatural, for His warfare, not less than ours, must be described in terms that transcend the category of the merely natural. It, also, takes account of supramundane and inframundane forces, and is intelligible only on suppositions that, in common parlance, are supernatural. Moreover, it lies on the surface of the narratives of Christ's Temptation that they do not pretend to be prosaic and literal records of fact. In twelve verses we have the spiritual history of forty days. The scene of temptation is said to be the wilderness ; yet two of the three specific trials are described as taking place elsewhere—the one on an exceeding high mountain which commanded a prospect of all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, the other in Jerusalem and on the pinnacle of the Temple. Regard, then, the narrative as record of actual events, and you must put it aside as portentous, and enigmatic, and no wise competent to illumine your own experience, or point a moral for your own guidance : regard it as the summary, set forth in eloquent symbols, of Christ's spiritual probation, at a crisis of supreme importance in His



earthly career, and you will find it luminous with warning and comfort.

Add to the Evangelist's account the declaration of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and read the one by the light of the other. "And straightway the Spirit driveth Him forth into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan : and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered unto Him." "We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." I read, then, the account of Christ's threefold temptation as representative and didactic.

I see the Son of Man treading the beaten track and bearing the common burden ; in Him I see the interpretation of our own trials, and the unveiling of the mysteries of our own experience : from His lips I hear the words which utter our duty also, and in His victory over the Tempter I find the promise of ours. May I assume that we accept this standpoint? Then we may carry an anxious personal interest to our study of Christ's Temptation in the wilderness.

Let me here observe that St. Luke seems to follow what may be called the natural order of the distinct and successive temptations. The first is



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concerned with the motive and object of Christ's life; the next, with its method and course; the last, with its effect. Consider these more closely.

The Son of Man, exhausted with hunger yet fully conscious of His extraordinary powers, is confronted with the suggestion that He should use those powers to stay that hunger. "If thou art the Son of God, command this stone that it become bread." What could be more reasonable or more religious? And yet the answer is an appeal both to reason and to religion. "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone." Now, in order to understand what this temptation really meant for Christ, we must ask, What in our experience corresponds with it? How does the symbolic narrative bear on our lives? Is it so hard to see? Go back to that wondrous borderland of manhood, left behind now, it may be far behind, when you, too, like the Son of Man, were in the enchanted wilderness of vague aspiration, and your mind, aflame with hopes, immense and undefined, was turning towards the future, in which lay hidden the courses of your life. You knew, dimly but surely, that you had powers: perhaps in the petty conflicts of boyhood you had discovered that your powers were exceptional: others were led, and eager to be led by you: and



with the knowledge of powers had come also a sense, strange and indefinable, but most clear and coercive, that in that dark future, in that greater world, where men strive and suffer, you were called to a special work. I think no generous and gifted young man is unvisited by the Messengers of God, bearing the sealed orders of the King, which are to determine the direction and character of his life. And, surely, wherever this is the case, there comes the Tempter with the same cool and plausible suggestion, "If thou art the Son of God, command this stone that it become bread." Recall your too ardent eyes from those distant horizons, and fix them on these nearer, more tangible objects. Prove your superior powers here and now : live in the present, and let the future alone : pour yourself out on the immediate interests, reserve nothing for the remoter ends : disown your dreams at the instance of your wants : serve yourself first of your gifts. And if, by the grace of God, any of your brave dreams in any measure has been realized ; if as you now recall that time of enthusiasm you can do so without shame ; if you treasure still the old ideal, better understood now after the bitter lessons of life, more humbly held, more reverently owned, more cautiously pursued, but still the same as that which burned on the landscape of your thought



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when first you looked with open eyes and chose your course—was not the secret of endurance uttered by the Lord when to the low reasonableness of the Tempter He answered simply with a profession of faith in Divine guidance and His own spiritual nature, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone"?

Pursue your recollections yet further. You have heard your summons—and you have obeyed. What was the temptation which at once encountered you? Was it not, precisely, this—to get to your end by unworthy means, to march to victory by accepting compromising alliances, to accept convention, to echo a shibboleth, to condone a lie? Probably more of us fail here than in the choice of object or the conscious motives of action. The apparent hopelessness of any other procedure daunts us: there is a strangely persuasive reasonableness about all counsels of compromise which wonderfully commends them to our acceptance: it seems so arrogant to set oneself against the established order, and the general opinion, and the main stream. The more we realise the range and power of the truth we own, the more clearly we perceive the difficulties which attach to its successful advocacy; the more strongly we are tempted to despair of success.



“And he led Him up, and shewed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, To Thee will I give all this authority, and the glory of them : for it hath been delivered unto me : and to whomsoever I will I give it. If Thou therefore wilt worship before me, it shall all be Thine.”

Christ is not asked to admit the rightfulness of Satan's dominion, only the indisputable fact ; He is not required to believe him good, only to admit his actual authority. How can it be wrong to recognise the facts ? Is it not the axiom of sound statesmanship to do so ? What is truth in the world of practical affairs, but, precisely, correspondence with fact ? And what importance really attaches to external acts and spoken words of homage ? “Profession with the tongue is but an external thing,” wrote Hobbes, uttering the secret creed of all time-servers, “and no more than any other gesture whereby we signify our obedience ; and wherein a Christian, holding firmly in his heart the Faith of Christ, hath the same liberty which the Prophet Elisha allowed to Naaman the Syrian.”<sup>1</sup>

And if you were able to resist this temptation also, able to preserve inviolate your allegiance to

<sup>1</sup> *Leviathan*, p. 396.



truth, able to guard your own self-respect, able to see through and sweep scornfully aside the sophistries of cowardice and ambition, could you find a truer or more luminous summary of that faith by which you overcame the world than this creed of the tempted Christ, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve"? We can understand, then, what spiritual trials are gathered up in this symbolic narrative also. The "exceeding high mountain," from which the dazzling landscapes of ambition were visible, was raised in the ardent mind itself, and the eyes that swept those far-reaching horizons were the eyes of the spirit. A whole multitude of commonplace, and, indeed, hardly regarded experiences of normal human life, are collected, interpreted, and appraised in this brief story. Whosoever is brought face to face with the necessity of choosing his method of serving his own ideals finds the choice (however subtly disguised) to come ultimately to this single alternative—the worship of Satan, the prince of this world, or the worship of God. That "the end justifies the means" is at once the most plausible and the most immoral of all casuistic principles. That the end determines the means is the truth which that false aphorism perverts. We may not seek a spiritual end by carnal means,



a moral victory by immoral procedures, a triumph of God by a service of Satan. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Naaman bowing himself in the House of Rimmon, with the prophet's absolution in his pocket, is a sufficiently familiar figure within the Christian Church, but not, on that account, is he rightly proposed for Christian imitation. The "Son of Man," facing in the solitude the facts of life, seeing, quite clearly, the practical force of the case for an unlawful complaisance, bringing that case sternly before the tribunal of conscience and decisively rejecting it, preferring deliberately the narrow way of sacrifice and suffering to the broad and obvious thoroughfare of convention, is the true model of Christians, wherever placed in the world, and whenever called to the conflict of God.

The victory of conscience has been won ; and along the lines of inviolable loyalty to principle success has been gained. In the Holy City, nay, on the very pinnacle of the Temple, the victor stands ; and still, at that sacred altitude, the Tempter is beside Him, and the whisper is in His ear, "If Thou art the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence : for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, to guard Thee : and, On their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest haply Thou dash Thy

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foot against a stone." Here, also, apply the key of normal experience and the symbolic narrative will yield its secret. The Bible is wonderfully sensitive on the subject of pride in all its many and varied manifestations,—the vulgar arrogance of the wealthy, the wounding insolence of the privileged and the powerful, the superciliousness of the learned, the scorn of the clever, the presumption of the gifted and successful. No form of pride is unrecognised or unrebuked in the Bible ; and against no sin is the sentence of Christ more severe and searching. Now there is one form of pride which may be called not unfitly the shadow of heroism. The man who sets himself against the stream of convention, who despises the common arguments of expediency, who sacrifices his interests on the altar of his convictions, who aspires to be a reformer of society, will have his own character developed and hardened in the process. He will be compelled, beyond other men, to take account of the almost infinite pettiness of partisans, he will have to depend on himself against forces which may advance respectable and even cogent claims on public regard, he will necessarily have every element of independence within him stimulated by exercise, and, as the consequence of all this, he will be tempted to an over-estimate of his own



powers, to an excessive dependence on himself, to a perilous neglect of those disciplines and cautions which are the normal safeguards of virtue—in fact, to a rash and unlawful presumption. How could this temptation be more justly described than in the symbolic record of the Gospel? And how could the principle of successful resistance be better expressed than in the simple yet pregnant rejoinder of the Son of Man—"Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"?

The temptations of Christ, then, are to be thought of as genuinely normal, and His behaviour with respect to them is to be regarded as in a true sense exemplary. He stands at the head of all the tempted, and all victories over evil are gathered up and interpreted in His spiritual probation. "Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

These words connect themselves inevitably in my mind with the name of one whom we have but just



lost, and whom we shall not soon forget, for, more than twenty years ago, I heard him preach on them a sermon in St. Mary's, Oxford, to undergraduates, which made a great impression on me at the time, and remains in my memory with strange distinctness still. It was the first time that I had seen his face or heard his voice, though his name was familiar to me as one that I had often heard spoken about with unfavourable comments as that of a man gifted and courageous, but unsafe and theologically unsound. At that time his famous sermons on "Eternal Hope" were fresh in men's minds, and the subject of active controversy. It is difficult for us now to understand the commotion they excited, for the opinions which they controverted, and which multitudes of religious people then felt themselves bound to maintain, have now fallen wholly into discredit.

There is an interesting passage in Dean Stanley's *Life* in which allusion is made to one of these sermons, preached on the last Sunday in 1876. The Dean had picked up Lord Beaconsfield in Whitehall, and carried him into the Abbey, where the two men, in their different ways the most remarkable, and, so to say, picturesque individuals of the time, stood for a few minutes on the pedestal of one of the vaster monuments in order to hear Canon Farrar



preach. As they came out into St. Margaret's Churchyard the Premier confided to the Dean his impressions. "I could not follow him," he said. "Perhaps I am hard of hearing, and I was not accustomed to his voice ; but it was a fine delivery, and suitable to the occasion. But I would not have missed the sight for anything—the darkness, the lights, the marvellous windows, the vast crowd, the courtesy, the respect, the devotion—and fifty years ago there would not have been fifty persons there!"<sup>1</sup>

Lord Beaconsfield was a shrewd observer, and it is significant that he was impressed by the greater popularity of religion evidenced by the general interest aroused by the preaching in the Abbey. We may, perhaps, recognise in the orator to whom he listened one of the most potent personal forces which ministered to the salutary change. It is an agreed point among his numerous critics that Dean Farrar succeeded in gaining the attention of the middle-class public of England and America beyond any other Anglican divine. He preached a discipleship to the historic Christ, which had little concern with theology and less with ecclesiastical systems : the ethical beauty of the Gospel was the commendation

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ii. 448.



of its religious message, and a fervour of moral enthusiasm was the motive-power of obedience. There was no mean courage exhibited in his open denunciation of dogmas, which, if no longer seriously believed or defended, were powerfully and even passionately maintained: no ordinary labours and no common gifts were bestowed on his ministry. Let any candid man consider the volume, range, and quantity of his published works, his continuous and indefatigable preaching, his widely-distributed activity in the promotion of the many good causes which enlisted his sympathy, his constant toil as a parish priest in what was then a great London parish, and the conclusion cannot be resisted that he was a laborious public servant as well as an eloquent and variously accomplished divine. In this famous and beautiful church he will always be remembered, not only as the great preacher whose fame drew to Westminster multitudes of eager listeners, but also as the jealous and loving custodian of this historic building, whose zeal initiated and carried through the work of restoration, which—however open to criticism in detail, and, of course, it would be mere affectation on my part to pretend that there were not occasions for criticism—was, in the main, a nobly-conceived work, which has secured to us a rare



historic treasure, and ought to be remembered with lasting gratitude. When, eight years ago, the Rector of St. Margaret's became Dean of Canterbury, he carried his zeal for restoration to the most famous and almost the most beautiful of English Cathedrals, on which he has left the abiding tokens of his efforts to preserve and beautify those noble fabrics, which enshrine the traditions and silently discipline the character of our ancient and famous nation. These were notable public services which were rendered primarily to Westminster and Canterbury, ultimately to the whole English race which finds in those holy places its ancestral homes and altars. Perhaps, however, his principal public service was neither his books nor his restorations, but a personal influence, broadly tolerant, deeply and enthusiastically Christian, touching men's lives at many points, and steadily operating for kindliness and cohesion for a whole generation. We know by many tokens that the National Church has, not for the first time in its history, fallen dangerously out of touch with the national thought, and, so to say, outside the main stream of national life. That situation in the past has always portended great disasters ; and it is hard not to think that great disasters are not now on their way.



It has been something to have had here in Westminster steadily sustained for so long, both in the Abbey under Dean Stanley, and his successor, whom we have just lost, and in St. Margaret's under Dr. Farrar, that tradition of theological liberalism and catholic sympathy which is the true, natural temper of a genuinely National Church. I do not forget that to many of you all these more or less general considerations will seem of little importance in comparison with the loss of one whom you knew in the manifold intimacies of personal friendship. You mourn to-day a teacher whom you loved and honoured for himself, from whom you had received spiritual counsels which have helped you in the difficult warfare of the soul, in whom you have seen an example of Christian living, which moved and encouraged you. I am sure that there are many of whom this would be true, for, since the obligation was laid on me to carry on the work of Christ in this place, I have learned how deep and general was the affection which his parishioners felt towards him and his. We thank God for a life fruitful and beneficent in many directions; we thank Him for the holy witness of a character inspired and chastened by the Life of Christ; we thank Him for the comfort and guidance of personal reminiscences of patience



and sympathy remaining to us from the past, a dear and inalienable possession.

“I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours : for their works follow with them.”



## XVI

### THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

AND WHEN HE WAS COME INTO THE TEMPLE, THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE ELDERS OF THE PEOPLE CAME UNTO HIM AS HE WAS TEACHING, AND SAID, BY WHAT AUTHORITY DOEST THOU THESE THINGS? AND WHO GAVE THEE THIS AUTHORITY?—*St. Matthew xxi. 23.*

THE cleansing of the Temple was, indeed, an action which challenged criticism; for it brought Christ into open conflict, not merely with orthodox sentiment or with professional convention, but with a powerful vested interest.

It appears to be certain that the Temple market was officially organised in connection with the sacrificial system which had its centre in the sacred edifice, and also that it was an extremely profitable monopoly possessed by the superior ecclesiastics. Thus it had a double character: in one aspect, it seemed a necessary adjunct of the Religion of Israel,

<sup>1</sup> Preached in St. Margaret's, Westminster, on Sexagesima (February 7, 1904).



and as such it had a share in the general claim to Jewish regard which that Religion, in all its developments and ramifications, preferred; in the other aspect, it was an oppressive private interest, which had thrust itself into the consecrated system, and grown great and strong under its sanction, and as such it provoked the deepest resentment in the popular mind and conscience. Accordingly, to do as Christ had done was to challenge this official blending of private business and public service, and at the same time to make direct appeal to the conscience of religious men.

You will observe that "the chief priests and elders of the people" make mention, not of Christ's teaching, but of His action. They said, "By what authority doest Thou these things? and who gave Thee this authority?" We may say of these questions that they were inevitable under the actual circumstances.

"They ask by what kind of authority (*ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ*), human or Divine, ecclesiastical or civil, assumed or conferred, He acts." We may observe that the Evangelists represent our Lord's teaching as marked by a singular and indeed unique authority. "It came to pass"—so runs the comment on the Sermon on the Mount—"when Jesus ended these



words, the multitudes were astonished at His teaching : for He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." Now the more authoritative any teaching is, the more indispensable in the teacher is a clear and satisfactory authorisation to teach. And this is true *a fortiori* of authoritative action. We must surely allow, therefore, that there was apparent reasonableness in the questions with which the official hierarchy faced the innovating Reformer : it was indispensable to make clear what weight attached to His words and acts, to ascertain by what right He stood forward as the critic of the existing system, what claim He could advance to the regard and acceptance of His fellow-men. The chief priests and elders of the people were the appointed guardians of faith and morals : they were under solemn obligation to look out for, detect, expose, prohibit, and suppress errors in religious belief and practice. So far, clearly, they were within their rights in demanding from Christ the nature and source of the authority which He possessed.

"This was the one point on which He seemed to be vulnerable," for it was sufficiently notorious that He lacked the ordinary and recognised credentials of the religious teacher. He had "sate at the feet of" no Gamaliel ; He had no certificates of know-



ledge from any seat of learning ; He had received no Rabbinic ordination ; He was not even a member, however humble, of the hereditary priesthood of His nation. On the contrary, His antecedents were quite well known, and they certainly gave no hint of any sufficient authority for His extraordinary action. Indeed, His teaching and action had provoked hostile comment in His own country. "Many hearing Him were astonished, saying, Whence hath this man these things? and what is the wisdom that is given unto this man? and what mean such mighty works wrought by His hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended in Him." The "offence," we may believe, was not in all cases dictated by sinful prejudice ; it may well have been often the result of a genuine perplexity ; but in all cases it had the effect of closing the mind against the truth, making men unable to judge Christ's action on its merits.

Now it is very notable that Christ, thus challenged as to His authority, refuses to give a direct answer. We might perhaps have expected that He would have referred the objectors to His miracles, which presumably were worked with the special design of



providing some obvious and sufficient justifications for His extraordinary procedure. It is, however, contrary to our Lord's habitual practice to make anything depend on miracles. The author of the Fourth Gospel, following out a scheme which was less historical than theological, represents Christ's marvellous acts as solemn "signs," intended to "manifest the glory" of the Incarnate; but the Synoptic evangelists, though they record many miracles, do not represent our Saviour as building anything on them. Rather He is described as discouraging men from discussing His wonders, and as shrinking from the inevitable fame which the report of miracle-working brought to Him. In the case of the Baptist He did in some degree depart from His usual reticence; but even so He accompanied His reference to miracles with a significant rebuke of the halting faith which had caused the desire for some other evidence of Messiahship than that which He in Himself was offering. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in Me." To the chief priests and the elders He refuses a direct answer, and prefers to meet their questions with a counter-question, which would have the effect of making them realize the character and importance of their own inquiries.



They had had among them in John the Baptist a preacher who had possessed, indeed, no official authorisation for his ministry, but who had so effectually gained the approbation of the general conscience that it had come to be an agreed point among the people that he was indeed a "prophet." The murder of the Baptist by Herod Antipas had invested him with the halo of martyrdom, and so secure was his position in the popular veneration that it would have been a perilous venture even for the Hierarchy itself to throw doubt on his authority. And everybody knew that John the Baptist had owned the Messiahship of Christ. To deny that Messiahship was to stultify the whole ministry of the great preacher who had made the nearness of Messiah's kingdom the very staple of his preaching, and had baptized men with the baptism of repentance in preparation for its advent.

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question, which, if ye tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?" That wonderful religious movement which had taken its rise in the wilderness of Judæa, springing suddenly to light like those strange subterranean rivers of



Northern England, which emerge abruptly from the cavities of the lime-stone rocks, and vanish again with the same weird suddenness—which had gathered about the rock-pulpit of the preacher all sorts and conditions of men, and stirred them all to repentance and reformation—what had Christ's questioners to say to that? To deny that John was a prophet was to deny the most evident testimonies of prophetic ministry, and yet only on the basis of that denial could the Messianic mission of Christ be disputed. So they stood before Him self-convicted. Ashamed to acknowledge their own deep infidelity to righteousness—afraid to insult the general conscience with their own moral deadness—they could but falter forth the humiliating plea of ignorance, "We know not." Christ had given them their answer. His authority was sufficiently demonstrated; it needed no formal statement. "He also said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

I have dwelt at such length on the narrative because to me it seems at every point luminous with spiritual teaching. For, when all is said, the scene depicted by the Evangelist is really a chapter of our own inner life, as well as an episode in the biography of Christ. We, not less than those



priests and elders of Israel, have to determine our own attitude towards the historic Jesus. Increasingly men are coming to acknowledge that the essence of Christianity is, precisely, Christ Himself; and when once this is clearly perceived, and we move away from all the lower temporary aspects of the Religion to face the Master Himself, as with unflinching power He still is at work before our eyes, wherever His genuine servants address themselves in the power of His Spirit and by the guidance of His recorded Example to the warfare against all forms of established evil,—when once we come into the presence of moral effort inspired by faith in the living Christ, then inevitably we must ask the same questions as of old were asked by the Jews, “By what authority doest Thou these things? And who gave Thee this authority?” And still the answer sends us back to the spiritual experience which we already possess, to the ministry of John the Baptist, the preacher of righteousness, who pointed men beyond himself to Another, in Whom his preaching would find sanction and fulfilment. Our attitude towards the truth we already have will interpret for us the larger truth which dawns in Christ. Live up to the moral standard you acknowledge and you will assuredly outgrow it—that is the law of disciple-

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ship. Be a good disciple of John the Baptist, and you will, in good time, hear him say of Another, Whom, as yet, you know not, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" It seems to me that the impregnable position of Christ's Religion must be found precisely here in its proved ability to accord with and interpret the highest moral truth of the race, and of the individual. In the historic episode the answer to Christ's questioners really leaped to their eyes in the moral quality of the action which moved their criticism. The author of the Fourth Gospel has estimated truly the abiding character of Christ's human career, when he sums it up in the challenge, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe Me?" The Gospel takes for granted a very noble conception of human nature; Christ's claim upon our confidence and love rests always on the old prophetic doctrine, that we have within ourselves the Divine witness to the trustworthy and the lovable. Perhaps much of the modern failure of the Gospel, as it is preached among us, may be explained by the fact that too often this ethical basis is left out of the preacher's reckoning, and the Christian Message is not linked to the native religiousness of men. We preach Christ to men who have not yet learned the preliminary



lesson of the prophets ; we set out in front of them our accumulated treasures of doctrine, and speak to them in the slowly-fashioned, half-technical, half-obsolete dialect of the school and of the sanctuary, and we wonder that they are unmoved and unattracted. First, we ought to have brought the conscience into play ; we ought to have waked the sleeping self-respect, and stripped off the veil which screens from men their own inherent sacredness. We ought to have taken them on the natural level where they are standing, and made clear to them the character and issues of the moral conflict which, consciously or unconsciously, they are actually waging. We ought to have begun with Christ audible in conscience, and in obedience to Him speaking within themselves have led them to Christ, manifested in the Gospel, and claiming in His own name the allegiance which is His due.

John the Baptist, summarising the long series of prophetic ministries which reached a close in himself, made his appeal simply to men's consciences. He might have adopted the very words of Micah : " He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." That doctrine brought men's consciences into action,



and started them on the salutary task of self-criticism. There is no criticism so searching, so honest, so inexorable as self-criticism; and, accordingly, if it be inspired by that prophetic doctrine of man's proper nobility, nay, natural divineness, it necessarily emerges in repentance. So the last word of prophetic witness is a preaching of repentance, and the final symbolism of the Old Testament is a baptism of repentance.

The *testimonium animae naturaliter Christianae*, of which the old Christian Apologist spoke, remains still the most convincing testimony to which we can appeal, as men come to us demanding, as they will always demand, the credentials of our message, meeting Christ in His Church, as He approaches them age after age in the everlasting Gospel, with the old questions, "By what authority doest Thou these things? And who gave Thee this authority?" We answer still by pointing our questioners to another Teacher, whom they have already received, and whose authority they dare not question—"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?" We are content to take the verdict of your conscience on the claims which in Christ's name we make upon you. There is nothing esoteric, nothing unintelligible, nothing hard to explain about



those claims ; they rest on the broad foundation of every man's loyalty to his higher self. Be true men, says the Master ; love truth for its own sake ; live by the inner light of your own worthiest intuitions, and you will find yourselves following with Me in the way. There is, properly, no originality in My teaching ; it is but the old whispered message of the conscience spoken clearly and with the new and more cogent authority of My Mission. "Jesus therefore answered them and said, My teaching is not mine, but His that sent Me. If any man willeth to do His Will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself." It is so that we must conceive of His service—a solemn, deliberate dedication of ourselves to live henceforward by the law of that higher humanity, which was manifestly supreme in the life of the Son of Man, and which, when we are most true to ourselves, we can perceive as controlling, though it be but partially, our lives also. And this, surely, is the obligation implied in receiving the holy Sacrament, which remains among us not merely as the last link of an unbroken chain binding our time with the distant age in which the Master walked this earth, but also as the Solemn Act which, by His ordinance, is charged with the blessed virtue of



bringing us, even here and now, into fellowship with Himself. To the holy Communion are invited, not the orthodox as such, not the zealous as such, not the righteous as such, but all who—with whatever perplexity of belief, whatever trouble of conscience, whatever burden of memory—can confess and accept His Version of Manhood, and own the authority of His Summons. “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”



## XVII

### THE SERVICEABLE LIFE<sup>1</sup>

FOR VERILY THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, BUT TO MINISTER, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY.—*St. Mark x. 45.*

OUR blessed Saviour sets out in these words two conceptions of human life. "To be ministered unto"—that expresses tersely and sufficiently one conception ; "to minister"—that expresses the other. The former commended itself then, and it commends itself still, to the unreflecting ambition of ordinary men. The disciples to whom the words of Christ were spoken are very truly representative of such. The Evangelist brings them before us in the unadorning, unidealising faithfulness of actual fact. We can understand their way of regarding Christ ; we can enter into their perplexity as to His strange manner of living ; we can even approve their stand-

<sup>1</sup> Preached in Westminster Abbey on the fourth Sunday in Lent, March 13, 1904.



point. Let us recall the scene. The Master and His disciples were approaching Jerusalem for the last time, and at every point on their journey indications accumulated to make them feel that their visit would have a solemn and critical character. The Apostles—simple peasants, whose feelings moved freely and were freely shown—were full of excitement; their imaginations were on fire with great expectations; and inevitably, being what and where they were, those expectations took shape in the air-castles of personal ambition. The prayer of the Sons of Zebedee was, indeed, hotly resented by the rest of the Apostles, but the resentment sufficiently proves that it did but utter the general sentiment: "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left hand in Thy kingdom." Christ refused and rebuked the request, but even in doing so He used language which seemed to authorise the expectations on which it was based: "To sit on My right hand or on My left hand is not Mine to give: but it is for them for whom it hath been prepared." The words were as fuel to the flame of apostolic ambition. "When the ten heard it, they began to be moved with indignation concerning James and John," and their anger, revealed perhaps in raised voices and eager gestures,



or, it may be, divined by the unerring intuition of Him who "knew what was in man," led the Master to address Himself solemnly to the whole band of Apostles. "Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you: but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all. For verily the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Thus He rebuked their eager ambition by declaring the deep contrast between His kingdom and such kingdoms as they knew, and added a more penetrating censure by reminding them of the manner of kingship He Himself had shown forth.

Two conceptions of human life, then, are uncovered and contrasted in the text. Now we cannot deny that both these conceptions have their roots deep in the constitution of humanity itself, and both, it cannot be disputed, must, in some sense, be united in a satisfactory description of human life. To live at all involves for every one a double experience of ministering and being ministered unto. There is no



escaping these conditions of existence in such a world as ours. However churlish and self-centred a man may be, he cannot wholly escape from the necessity of rendering service ; however generous and self-renouncing he may be, he certainly will find himself compelled to receive service from others. May we not say that it is, precisely, the twofoldness of this necessary and universal experience which constitutes life in the world for every man the instrument of moral education, and, not less, of moral testing. Character is developed and revealed in the article of service received and service rendered. As the one aspect or the other commands primacy of regard, so does the character take shape and stand confessed. Some there are to whom the needs and opportunities of service appeal with paramount and irresistible strength ; they acknowledge the one, they rise eagerly to the other. Life naturally becomes to them a Sacrament of Divine Helpfulness, a continually-heard, continually-obeyed vocation to Ministry. Of them, wherever placed in the vast and manifold system of society, the Master's Words about Himself may, in a measure, be spoken ; they, like Him, carry ever on the earth the sacred and sanctifying character of service ; they also have come to minister, and to give their lives for the rescue and help of others.



Unhappy, indeed, is the man who, in the course of life, has not fallen in with such ; unhappy if, when the bitterness of the world's treasons comes darkly upon him, and the sombre misery of universal doubt clouds his mind, he cannot go aside into the Shrine of Memory and worship there the hallowed Household Gods of personal sacrifice and charity—dear, deathless names of mother, sister, wife, and friend, each one God's Witness and his own ! And there are some to whom this aspect of life, as at every point asking for ministry, makes no appeal. They, too, find themselves needing the help of their fellows ; they, too, find their fellows ready to help them ; but what they find has no other effect than to call into play and wonderfully stimulate all the selfishness latent within them. They grow to regard society as an organisation directly designed for their comfort and advancement. Less and less does the thought of service as due from them to society find admission to their minds ; more and more it is barred out from entrance by the ever-multiplying requirements of self. Of them, also, the word of Christ is true ; their whole life from cradle to grave might be summed up in the simple and luminous sentence, "they came to be ministered unto." It needs not to ask whether we have known such persons. Society is full of them,



and, unless the prophets of our time speak falsely, becoming yearly more full of them. The old World has to carry on its weary shoulders an ever-waxing burden of useless drones, who take all and give nothing back, and, worse still, of social wolves, who are abroad in society only to prey upon it.

Thus, then, out of the necessary conditions of human life—conditions of personal service and dependence upon the service of others—are manufactured the two great types of human character, which reflect and are determined by the two great principles of human conduct. On the one hand, there is the self-centred character which has, as its guiding principle, the satisfaction of selfish desire, and which has grown out of an exaggerated and even exclusive regard to the service-receiving aspect of human life. On the other hand, there is the service-rendering character, which has its guiding principle in the recognition of other rights than its own, which has grown out of a careful regard for that aspect of life which is not selfish, which presents it at every turn as a demand for personal help addressed by society to its several members.

Now, when we thus sharply set out the contrast uttered in the text, we are obviously in considerable danger of being misunderstood. We may be thought



to lie open to the charge, that we are the advocates of an impracticable morality, that the Christian ideal of conduct which we present, however in itself lofty and noble, is of no real value when offered to men and women, living in such a society as ours, and required to take their full share of the toils and sorrows of common life. We are in danger, I say, when we emphasise the Altruism of the Gospel as illustrated in the Life of Christ, of waking against ourselves a twofold resentment. On the one hand, common sense rebels against teaching which, claiming to be serviceable in practice, is properly incapable of practical application ; and, on the other hand, conscience is offended by the inevitable contrast between such supra-mundane ethics and the actual commonplace morality which evidently governs the preachers' own lives. Now, it seems to me worth while to make an effort to rescue my present discourse from these perils ; and I do this the more willingly since I do honestly think that we do serious wrong to the Gospel when we give the impression that the conduct it requires is beyond the reach of ordinary citizens of the world ; and I am quite sure that nothing is more injurious to the preacher himself than to allow the habit, but too easy of acquisition, of speaking apart from the responsibilities of action, drawing



word-pictures of impossible goodness, which no one dreams of treating as anything else. It must always be remembered that, in the Gospel, we have the revelation of a truth designed for the guidance and help of human life, under ordinary conditions. The suggestion of an Incarnation is the supreme potential excellence of human nature. The Gospel prohibits any doubt as to the moral competence of men to rise to the perfection exhibited in the Incarnate. But this is not all. The historic circumstances of the Incarnation are themselves deeply suggestive. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking," that is, there was no rearrangement of terrestrial conditions to make the perfect human life possible in His case. He took the world as it was; and under the actual circumstances of His age, race, country, and position in society, He so lived as to demonstrate for all time the possibility of living as men ought to live under the world's laws of existence. Therefore, we must never accept any less complete evidences of Christ's ethical teaching than that which emerges from His Life as a whole. Individual texts or episodes must be read in connection with His entire course: only by remembering this shall we succeed in keeping the true proportions of the Gospel. Certain it is that our blessed Master did not seem to



the view of His contemporaries either an ascetic or a preacher of an impossible morality. He was one of the common people in the external ordering of His life ; and though to individuals He addressed Himself in terms of ascetic demand, yet it is clear that He had no general requirement which should make social life and civic allegiance impossible in the case of His disciples. "Is not this the Carpenter?" asked His enemies contemptuously. "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Thy disciples fast not?" cavilled the Scribes, scandalised at the unconventional aspect of His teaching. There are many such passages in the Gospels, and they authorise the statement that Christ's perfect Altruism did not imply an impracticable virtue, did not banish Him from the ordinary tasks and obligations of Palestinian life. We must draw the inference, therefore, that no version of Christian morality can be accepted as sound which is properly inconsistent with social life. Moreover, I started by admitting that both the contrasted types of human life have their justifications in the conditions of terrestrial existence. The egotistic or self-regarding instincts of our nature have as rightful a place in the determination of conduct as the altruistic or service-rendering instincts. Both,



indeed, are essential to human development, and both, cleansed and duly checked, must unite in ministering to the welfare of human society. Our Master Himself combines them when, in answer to one who asked Him by what means he should gain eternal life, He re-affirmed the two fundamental laws of love to God and love to man, stating the latter in the suggestive form, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Read, then, the text as charged to carry no burden of moral demand beyond our powers, no commandment destructive of civic life in such a world as ours, but rather as lifting the worthiest human life our own experience attests out of the category of temporal reckoning on to the plane of everlasting truth, linking the nobler types and modes of earthly effort on to the Divine Purpose of the World's Release. "For verily the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Keeping our discourse, then, within the lines traced clearly by the general experience, I may submit two propositions as very important in our present discussion. The first is this. There is, in point of fact, a clear and universally recognised division of men in society into two great categories



—those in whom the egotistic, or selfish, or service-receiving instincts are paramount; and those in whom the altruistic, or unselfish, or service-rendering instincts prevail. Society, in short, consists of those that “minister” and those that “are ministered unto.” The next proposition is this. This division is determined, not by fortune or circumstance, but by will and disposition. The noblest examples of self-sacrifice are often found among those whose birth, training, and condition of life might, at first sight, seem to imply the arrogance and exorbitant claims of privilege; and conversely, the most repulsive instances of selfishness are not rarely met with among the very poor, whose characters, it might be supposed, had been fashioned in the very school of service, and in the atmosphere of sacrifice. From this it follows that we do not hesitate to regard both altruists and egotists as fit subjects for moral judgment. We approve the one, and condemn the other. We do not mean by an unselfish, public-spirited man, one who has no regard for his own interests, but rather one who so regards them as to respect the interests of others, one who makes his inevitable love of himself the measure of his consideration for others, and learns to make just allowance for their rights by his just insistence on his own. Now the Gospel tells us

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that the Son of Man Himself was the supreme example of this type of manhood ; that we, who own His Lordship, are to be in society among those who "minister." He has told us very solemnly that, constituted as we are, there must be dominant within us some single principle ; we cannot oscillate between different principles, following now one, and now another, as the mood of the moment sways us. "No man can serve two Masters . . . Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." If, at first sight, we are disposed to demur to this decisive allocation of men into camps, we shall, on reflection, find that our Master, as always, speaks the very truth about us which our own self-knowledge suggests. Is it not the case that men are selfish, or unselfish, even though occasional actions might deserve another description ? There is such a thing as a set of the will, a direction of the life, a tendency of the whole character ; and these are what determine our moral category ; these declare our spiritual allegiance. Perhaps experience would sustain yet one more proposition, also important and relevant to our present discussion. Is it not the case that, for most of us, the effect of living in the world is unfriendly to the higher type of character ? Explain it how you will, it is the fact that more often than not the social environment



in a great modern Capital does not tend to draw out and exercise the best and most generous instincts of human nature. The increasing strain of competition, the quickening pace of modern life, the destruction for multitudes of all those kindly influences which gather about such words as "home" and "neighbour," the immense prizes which the modern world offers to the bold and the unscrupulous, the dismaying contrasts of social fortune,—all these, and a hundred other circumstances, give disastrous stimulus to selfishness. Therefore the Christian Ideal needs to be ever re-affirmed, and restored to its rightful prominence amongst us: not an impracticable, still less an irrational scheme of life, but one that we all, in our hearts, confess to be right and blessed, and which is for all time exemplified in Him Whose Name we bear. "For verily the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus Christ came into a world curiously like ours in some respects—a world of great cities, of deep social cleavages, of widely-distributed suffering. It was a world which had no knowledge of the inherent greatness of Man, as the servant of mankind. That world could not understand One Who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and it



murdered Him in its ignorance. But, in truth, "He gave his life a ransom for many," and even in that culminating wickedness which raised the Cross on Calvary, He opened men's eyes, and unloosed their fetters. There on that Hill of Shame and Affliction He set in motion the mighty Force which should recreate human society on the basis of His Law of Service. St. Paul's logic is the logic of the human heart itself, and every generation since has drawn the same conclusion as the Apostle. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died: and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him Who for their sakes died and rose again." The question which concerns us is, precisely, whether such language has meaning for ourselves. Do we, or do we not, accept our Master's version of human life? In which class of men, the service-receiving or the service-rendering, those that are ministered unto or those that minister, the selfish or the serviceable, do we choose and try to stand? On this question turns the whole issue of discipleship, and we must answer it for ourselves. "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple" — so said the Master at the first, and His words remain true and



relevant for us. There is a Cross to be borne if we would in any worthy sense be the servants of society. We cannot help others without making sacrifices of time, sympathy, health, money ; yet woe to us if we do not help, if, as we examine our course of life, there is nothing helpful in it ; if, as we gather the accumulating records of memory, there are no blessed histories of mercy and sacrifice among them ; if, when we fall from the ranks of the living, and the place which knew us knows us thenceforth no more, there are none to hold our names in grateful recollection, and to lay on our graves the unfading wreaths of reverence and love !



## XVIII

### THE PATTERN DEATH<sup>1</sup>

AND WHEN JESUS HAD CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE, HE SAID, FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT: AND HAVING SAID THIS, HE GAVE UP THE GHOST. AND WHEN THE CENTURION SAW WHAT WAS DONE, HE GLORIFIED GOD, SAYING, CERTAINLY THIS WAS A RIGHTEOUS MAN.—*St. Luke xxiii. 46-47.*

IT is very difficult to preach on Good Friday; for the event which we commemorate is almost too solemn, too awful, too deeply and piteously sad to be spoken about. No doubt the Crucifixion is something more than a historic Tragedy: it is an Act in the Divine Drama of Redemption. Christians have always seen it in its religious context, midway between the Incarnation, which it may be said in some sense to interpret, and the Resurrection, by which it is in some sense interpreted. Always, I say, this has been the case. Whatever theories of Atonement may, from time to time, have secured acceptance in the Church, and it is mere matter of

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Good Friday, April 10, 1903, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



fact that such theories have been not a few, and all, perhaps, now either rejected or in the process of being rejected, this, from the very first, has determined the course of Christian thought, that the Crucified was none other than the Incarnate Son of God, and that, by the Way of the Cross, He was passing to His glorious Resurrection. St. Paul's words in the Palm-Sunday Epistle give us the right and religious standpoint from which to regard the Pageant of Crime and Calamity with which to-day we are encountered. This is the meaning of the Crucifixion, and this its drift: "Christ Jesus, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men: and, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the Name which is above every Name; that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." And inasmuch as the Crucifixion is an Act in the Drama of Redemption, Christians, from the first,



have seen it in relation to the sin of the world, and therein to their own separate and individual sinfulness. "God commendeth His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Hence the Crucifixion, seen in connection with that Reconciliation with God, which the human conscience, sin-stained and fear-burdened, yearns for, comes to wear an aspect of profound and moving attractiveness. Above the Cross on Calvary, sinners—and such we know ourselves to be—read the legend of Divine Charity and unlimited hope. "Sic Deus dilexit mundum," "So God loved the world."

Is it not strange, the darkest hour  
That ever dawned on sinful earth  
Should touch the heart with softer power  
For comfort, than an Angel's mirth?  
That to the Cross the mourner's eye should turn  
Sooner than where the stars of Christmas burn?

And yet, what I said at the beginning is true: it is very difficult to preach on Good Friday; for then the theological and religious aspects of the Crucifixion inevitably fall into the background of our thought, and the naked horror of the historic tragedy stands out to view. What a tragedy it is! Where in the long record of human wickedness and human woe is there any adequate parallel to this



story of the Cross? The annals of the world are full of oppression, of sorrow, of immense and undeserved misfortune, of heinous and unsuspected treason, of strange and cruel desertion ; but take all these bitter herbs of human destiny at their historic worst, and mingle them all in the draught of a single fate, and even then you will be far from the sombre pathos of Calvary. The annals of the world are illumined by saints, benefactors, heroes of witness and reform, martyrs of the Truth. Gather from the centuries their treasures of goodness and courage, and combine them all in a single career, and even then you will be far from "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." To-day, that unique and unmeasured misery of human fate, that blended Chalice of all calamity and all crime, are linked with the sole and peerless Innocence, the unequalled self-devotion, the pure courage of the Son of Man. The incongruity between fortune and desert, which gives its painful interest to every record of undeserved failure and unaccepted protest, is here extreme and manifest. There is a sense in which Gibbon's words are true. The painted Crucifix is "the most repulsive object ever presented to the groaning adoration of mankind"; for the painted Crucifix sets forth with relentless and almost



insolent prominence all that most we are ashamed of in our own conduct, and all that most we shrink from in our own experience. And on Good Friday, as year by year it brings to us its solemn and terrible Message from a Past, which yet is always present, we necessarily read that message amid the babel and movement of a world in haste to enjoy itself. Around us in these great communities (in the midst of which the Church of Christ seems to linger like a discarded battleship of ancient form and fame in a modern harbour) there proceed, unhindered and untouched, the bustle and confusion of a general holiday ; we seem to hear as from the very darkness of Calvary that cry, so lamentable and filled with protest, which carries to us from a yet older time the weight of great afflictions: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger."

The Son of Man came to teach His brethren in the great family and fellowship of mankind how to live, and also how to die ; and it is His Death as exemplary that I desire to present to you for consideration to-day. For my text I have taken the last of the "Seven Words from the Cross."



“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit: and having said this, He gave up the ghost.” The words are a quotation from the 31st Psalm, as the fourth Word from the Cross is a quotation from the 22nd. A suggestion not to be forgotten lies in the fact that our dying Redeemer thus drew on the Psalms for comfort in those last hours of life. We may securely argue from dying words to living habits: it was because He had been accustomed to nourish His devotional life by the religious use of the Psalms that, when He came to die, He thus fell back on them for strength. And the same must be said of the attitude of the spirit towards God. What it was in death, that it had been in life. No trait of Christ’s character is more original and none more winning than the loving simplicity of His habitual attitude towards His Father; and here, on the Cross, that attitude is still apparent. The first and the last words from the Cross are addressed to the Father: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”; “Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit.” In the interval between those words our Redeemer had passed under a dark cloud of desolation; He had lost for the moment the sense of the Father’s love, and had lifted His voice in



protest, sinless yet infinitely woeful, to an unregarding Heaven: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But it was only for a moment; underneath Him still in that horrible darkness were the Everlasting Arms, and, as His last vigour failed Him, it was into Them that He fell to rest.

And, though the strife be sore,  
Yet in His parting breath  
Love masters Agony: the soul that seem'd  
Forsaken, feels her present God again,  
And in her Father's arms  
Contented dies away.

Perhaps we are disposed to attach too much importance to the words of the dying, and too little to the necessary connection between the life and the spiritual condition at the hour of death. Certain it is that there are many who go sadly all their years because their dear ones have passed away in silence, or with the reckless utterances of delirium and derangement, or in the stupor of unconsciousness. "We ought not so much to stand upon the strangeness of any man's end," wrote that wise old Cambridge preacher, William Perkins, three centuries ago, "when we know the goodness of his life; for we must judge a man not by his death, but by his life. And if this be true, that strange diseases, and



thereupon strange behaviours in death, may befall the best man that is, we must learn to reform our judgments of such as lie at the point of death." It is beyond all question true that the holiest men have sometimes been most clouded with doubts and fears when they come to die, and we all know how pious has sometimes been the ending of lives, undedicated and unworthy.

"The love of God is like a sea," writes our Elizabethan casuist (who himself is said to "have died in the conflict of a troubled conscience"<sup>1</sup>), "into which when a man is cast, he neither feels bottom nor sees bank. I conclude, therefore, that despair, whether it arise out of weakness of nature, or of conscience of sin, though it fall out about the time of death, cannot prejudice the salvation of them that are effectually called." A gentle, holy soul like Cowper passes away with the weight of spiritual despondency unlifted, feeling himself in fact, what his last poem so pathetically described, a Castaway :—

No voice divine the storm allay'd,  
No light propitious shone,  
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,  
We perish'd each alone :  
But I beneath a rougher sea,  
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

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<sup>1</sup> Fuller, *Holy and Profane State*, p. 82.



A worthless rake, whose whole life has been one continuous insult to his Maker, like that Earl of Rochester whom Burnet ministered to in his last days, makes an edifying end, and passes away with words of assurance on his lips. It is evident to every thoughtful man that such contrasts indicate at least this truth, that dying words cannot have the significance with which we are accustomed to invest them. It is surely a solemn and suggestive fact that our Redeemer, in His dying hours, experienced the anguish of spiritual despondency, not by failure of faith, but by loss of the consciousness of God's love: here, indeed, is a deep and dark mystery, which we may not pierce or unravel. "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf," says St. Paul, and what spiritual privation and alienation went to that awful vicariate of guilt we cannot know; but we may, none the less, find in the desolation of the Son of Man His acceptance and recognition of that strange and perplexing burden of uncheered dying.

The duty of preparing for death is as obvious as it is, by most of us, neglected; on Good Friday, when we gather round the Cross on which our Saviour dies, it is a subject which we cannot ignore. It is no doubt the case that a great change has



passed over our view of death. The older religious writers give death a place in their scheme of doctrine and devotion, which certainly seems to us somewhat excessive ; they deliberately brought death before their minds by a system of somewhat artificial associations, which strike us now as far-fetched and, in practice, unhelpful. Take for sufficient example one of the famous Bishop Hall's "Self-conferences." "Everything that I see," he says, "furnishes me with fair monitions of my dissolution. If I look into my garden, there I see some flowers fading, some withered ; if I look to the earth, I see that mother in whose womb I must lie ; if I go to church, the graves that I must step over in my way show me what I must trust to ; if I look to my table, death is in every dish, since what I feed on did once live ; if I look into my glass, I cannot but see death in my face ; if I go to my bed, there I meet with sleep, the image of death, and the sheets which put me in mind of my winding up ; if I look into my study, what are all those books but the monuments of other dead authors ? O my soul, how canst thou be unmindful of our parting, when thou art plied with so many monitors." <sup>1</sup>

We shall all probably agree that there is some-

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, viii. 58.



thing unnatural, and even morbid, in such a habit of mind as these words appear to indicate. The severe and, as it seems to us, mechanical doctrine of perdition, which obtained among Christians until recent times, reacted inevitably on their thought about death. "In the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be," was a verse often on their lips, and held to be decisive on the question whether or not beyond the grave there was opportunity of redemption. We are much more sensitive now as to the moral aspect of the doctrines we maintain, much more chary of attributing to the Absolute Equity of Almighty God methods and procedures which, to our limited perceptions of what is equitable, are repellent; and all observers agree that within the last two generations there has been an immense development of secularism among us. Life has become much more interesting to most, much more attractive to many, of our people; and they have little margin of attention for the unpalatable subject of death, and the shadowy possibilities which lie beyond. And yet, when we think soberly, there is no small risk, no slight impropriety, in this easy secularism. Sure it is that we must die, and that the hour of our death is hidden from us. Sure it is that when we die we perforce make an end of these



lives which, as citizens of the world, we have received; our time is up, our campaign concluded, our part played; we must hand in whatsoever work we have wrought on the earth; we must go before the Eternal Judge such men as we have brought ourselves to be. To prepare for death is so to live that the natural progress of our lives, the natural development of ourselves, will bring us peace at the last.

Turn now once more to the dying Son of Man in Whom we may see the model of righteous departure. Death has no terrors for Him. Face to face with Eternity He is at peace. Backward over the irrevocable past His mind travels without dismay. He reviewed it in prayer on the eve of the Crucifixion, and before His conscience it stood a completed thing. "I glorified Thee on the earth," He said to the Eternal Father, "having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do"; and here on the Cross, amid the heart-rending circumstances of the Passion, He faces the past again, without faltering or fear: "It is finished." And when He turns His dying gaze from the irrevocable past to the shrouded and threatening future, He is not less at peace: "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit." What calm in failure is here! What strength in weakness! What love in Death! He can wait

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God's hour in patience, for He knows that hour will surely come.

If I stoop  
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,  
It is but for a time : I press God's lamp  
Close to my breast ; its splendour, soon or late,  
Will pierce the gloom : I shall emerge one day.

The Death of Jesus was the fitting close to His Life ; it is one piece with it ; a natural climax, a symmetrical, harmonious ending ; and the lesson it gives lies precisely there. Would we die so, facing calmly our own past, facing without dismay what lies before us in the hidden land ? We must live so—not a life of mere self-seeking, mere self-indulgence, but such a life as His, Whose Life was one pageant of sacrifice in service.

Life that dares send  
A challenge to its end,  
And when it comes say "welcome friend."

So to live is to prepare to die, for, in truth, it is, in St. Paul's phrase, to die daily. "He that would be able to bear the Cross of all crosses, namely death itself, must first of all learn to bear small crosses, as sickness in body and troubles in mind, with loss of goods and of friends, and of good name ; which



I may fitly term little deaths, and the beginnings of death itself; and we must first of all acquaint ourselves with these little deaths, before we can be well able to bear the great death of all. Again, the afflictions and calamities of this life are, as it were, the harbingers and purveyors of death; and we are first to learn how to entertain those messengers, that when Death, the lord himself, shall come, we may in better manner entertain him."<sup>1</sup>

Do we say, as perhaps we can hardly help saying, or, at least, thinking, that between the sinless Jesus and our sinful selves there is a difference so profound that it seems to empty His example of value, and our imitation of hope? I would answer that, precisely because He was personally sinless, is He able to set before us the only Example that is of real value for us, the Example of manhood in its integrity, unspoiled, untainted, unshadowed by evil. It is worth little to contemplate an Example which comes comfortably near to our hearts, because, in truth, it never moves beyond the straitened frontiers of our habits, and, therefore, lays on us no coercions, and humbles us by no censures. Jesus Christ exalts our estimate of manhood, while He lowers our estimate of ourselves; He draws upon, and draws

<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *A Salve for a Sick Man*.



out in action, the best elements in us—elements, it may be, which were latent, unsuspected, even submerged. The centurion, set to guard the Cross, could not escape the influence of Christ's death: "He glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man"; and we, not less, sin-stained as we know ourselves to be, feel the nobility of that manhood which is His and ours. And there is yet more to say. As the Son of Man commends His spirit into the Father's Hands, revealing amid the dreadful circumstances of the Crucifixion an inner harmony and repose of soul which no outward afflictions could endanger or disturb, we get a view of a relationship betwixt God and man which answers to our deepest yearnings, and promises the satisfaction of our best hopes. God as well as man is made manifest on Calvary—God in limitless charity, man in uttermost obedience; God in man seen in His true Character, man in God seen in his true destiny. The great gulf of alienation, widened from age to age by the revolt of human wills, and the ever-waxing mass of historic sin, is bridged at last; and into our troubled human life, sin-cursed, error-darkened, terror-ridden, there has been cast by a pierced Hand the healing herbs of mercy and hope. In the Crucified henceforward we see the promise and the potency of an



immense rectification ; and the Cross is that Tree of God whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Henceforth we embrace and proclaim the Paradox of Calvary. " We preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block, and unto Gentiles foolishness : but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."



## XIX

### CAIAPHAS<sup>1</sup>

BUT A CERTAIN ONE OF THEM, CAIAPHAS, BEING HIGH PRIEST THAT YEAR, SAID UNTO THEM, YE KNOW NOTHING AT ALL, NOR DO YE TAKE ACCOUNT THAT IT IS EXPEDIENT FOR YOU THAT ONE MAN SHOULD DIE FOR THE PEOPLE, AND THAT THE WHOLE NATION PERISH NOT.—*St. John xi. 49-50.*

OF all the figures in the drama of the Passion, perhaps that of the High Priest is both the least attractive and the most interesting. We who are Christians know that Caiaphas was the last of the long line of high priests who possessed validity of spiritual office. The succession was continued, indeed, until the final destruction of the Jewish polity ; but, after the Messiah's advent, there was no longer any rightful place for the preparatory system which the high priests represented, and those who carried the office, which had lost its *raison d'être*, did so as avowedly rejecting the Messiahship of our Lord. Caiaphas in Christian eyes is the last of the high

<sup>1</sup> Preached in Westminster Abbey on Palm Sunday, March 27, 1904.



priests. Little is known about him beyond what the Evangelists record, but their brief statements are deeply suggestive, and leave on the student's mind a wonderfully distinct impression of the man. Caiaphas, indeed, may be said to illustrate the words spoken by the aged Simeon as he held the Infant Jesus in his arms: "This Child is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel." Our Lord brought a searching test to bear upon His contemporaries; and, at this distance of time, we can see that they were taking their places in the judgment of posterity just as they ranged themselves on His side, or on the side of His opponents. Of course this character of abiding decisiveness belongs in measure to every great human career, which carries the moral destinies of men plainly bound upon it; but in that Career, which all agree to be most conspicuously rich in moral significance, the general law is most of all seen to operate. The Son of Man is the Judge of His contemporaries, whose reputation is finally fixed by their treatment of Him.

Caiaphas had come to his great office as the most capable member of a powerful family, which for a whole generation monopolised power in Jerusalem. It is difficult to make out clearly the course of events which led to his appointment as



high priest by Valerius Gratus, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate's predecessor, nor is it clear what were his official relations with his father-in-law, Annas, with whom he is said to have acted in the conduct of the Trial of Christ, and who appears to have been "the power behind the throne" of successive high priests. Caiaphas held office until the year 37, during a period of no less than eighteen years, a circumstance which, perhaps, carries a suggestion as unfavourable to his character as favourable to his ability. "His long term of office," it has been justly remarked, "shows that in his relations with the Romans he must have been obsequious and adroit." He seems to have been what we are accustomed to describe as "a thorough-going Erastian." Religiously, Caiaphas was a Sadducee, and, as such, naturally averse to everything which was enthusiastic or fanatical. Popular agitations inspired by religious fervour would have seemed to him morally repugnant and politically perilous; his first thought would be to keep religion out of politics, as a violent and intractable force which, once brought into play, might easily get out of hand, and once out of hand might bring about the worst public disasters. We know that there was much in the recent history of the Jews which justified a profound distrust of



religion in politics, and it can never be blameworthy in a ruler to desire public tranquillity, and even to make great efforts to secure it. Caiaphas, moreover, was a very wealthy man; he and his reverend relatives appear to have held a lucrative monopoly in that Temple Market which provoked our Saviour's public condemnation, and which, we have reason for thinking, was generally regarded by the Jews as a grave abuse. Thus the high priest was a prominent representative of all that is most averse to social change—wealth, rank, public office, profitable commerce, established religion. Surely such a man, so placed, was a strangely incongruous exponent of the Jewish Theocracy: he was as one of the Popes of the Renaissance, an embodied satire on his own spiritual claims. Indeed, the very magnitude of the implied perversion shows that the Jewish Theocracy had run its course, and served its purpose. There is nothing more melancholy and more potent for mischief than an exhausted hierarchy, which rests on its abuses, and is only active on its own behalf.

Caiaphas is brought before us by the Evangelists in two capacities. He is, first, the author of the policy which triumphed on Calvary. St. John lifts the veil of secrecy which ordinarily covers the motives



of politicians, and allows us to hear the proposals of the high priest to his official colleagues. The secrets of the sacerdotal Cabinet are divulged, and we may track the course of the high conspirators. "The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many signs. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." It is Caiaphas the politician who speaks, and he speaks well. Who will deny that the *salus populi*, the public safety, must override any individual's rights? Could any statesman afford to admit the contrary? Caiaphas was not imagining a situation. There was danger of the loss of all national independence if the peace were again disturbed by some fresh pretender to Messianic Dignity. "His plan seems to have been founded on a just and sound view of the temper of his own nation and of the Roman authorities—a clear-sighted and comprehensive view, omitting no element that ought to be taken into account,



except the existence of God and His nearness to men.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the high priest’s distinctive contribution to political discussion was surely just the insistence on that supremely important, but easily forgotten and always hotly-resented element—the existence of God and His nearness to men.

The scene changes, and Caiaphas comes before us no more as a politician, but as a judge, the head of the judicial system of Israel. Let us consider him in this character. We shall find that the God-forgetting politician is also the law-regardless judge. The law which Caiaphas had to administer was mild and just. Especially was this the case when human life was at stake. “With regard to criminal, and especially to capital, cases there can be no doubt,” we are assured, “that long before the time of Jesus the value set by the law upon the life of a Hebrew citizen had led to extraordinary precautions. What have been called the four great rules of their criminal jurisprudence—‘strictness in the accusation, publicity in the discussion, full freedom granted to the accused, and assurance against all dangers or errors of testimony’—are carried out even in the Mishna in minute and scrupulous rules, leaning almost ostentatiously in every point to the side of the accused. And they

<sup>1</sup> *The Trial of Jesus Christ*, by A. Taylor Innes, p. 52.



ruled most of all in the case of a trial for life. Indeed, so far does this go, that modern Jews have been disposed to represent capital punishment as abhorrent to the whole genius of Hebrew jurisprudence."

The trial of Jesus Christ has been examined by modern scholars with the utmost care, and from very different standpoints. The apologists of Caiaphas have striven to show that at least the high priest could plead the necessity, under which he lay, of carrying out the law; but this plea breaks down before the demonstration that, in his conduct of that trial, Caiaphas allowed almost every rule of law to be broken. A singularly clear and convincing monograph by the late Mr. Taylor Innes will perhaps be known to many of my hearers. There we have a modern lawyer's criticism of the process by which our Saviour was brought to death as a criminal. We may sum up that criticism in the familiar words of the Hebrew prophet, which have always seemed to Christians as wondrously descriptive of the Lord's Passion: "By oppression and judgment He was taken away." Mr. Innes takes us through the whole series of proceedings over which Caiaphas presided, and shows that, at every point, the just and merciful provisions of the Hebrew law were disregarded. The law protected the accused against private and



personal investigation, but Jesus Christ was hurried from the Garden of Gethsemane, where He had been illegally arrested, to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where He was illegally examined. St. John tells us that there was also a similar examination at the House of Annas, the high priest's father-in-law. The law clearly forbade nocturnal proceedings; but the Trial of Jesus, so far as we can understand the statements of the Evangelists, was carried through mainly in the night. The law prohibited judicial proceedings on the day before a Sabbath, and insisted on an adjournment in capital cases; but Christ was tried on Friday, and the sentence of death was immediately pronounced. The law required at least two witnesses, whose testimony agreed together: Christ was condemned on the evidence of confused and conflicting depositions; and this breach of justice was the more grave, since, according to the practice of the time, the statements of the witnesses really constituted the charge against the prisoner. In Christ's case it would appear that He was held to be accused of blasphemy because He claimed the character of the Messiah. No doubt the claim stirred the religious passions of the Sanhedrin beyond restraint; and as the legal weakness of the case against our Lord



became apparent, as illegalities were accumulated to secure conviction, but without success, at length the rage of His judges over-passed all limits, and He was condemned amid the uproar and violence of what had ceased to be a Sanhedrin and had become a mob. Caiaphas alone was cool in that angry scene, and He struck in at the right moment to utilise for the fatal purpose he had in view the fanatical passion which he despised. We may not tell the story of that dramatic climax save in the sacred words of the Evangelist :—

“And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest Thou nothing? What is it which these witness against Thee? But He held His peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, and saith unto Him, Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am : and ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven. And the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What further need have we of witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy : what think ye? And they all condemned Him to be worthy of death.”

That was the crowning illegality. There was no blasphemy in claiming to be the Messiah, but



only in claiming falsely. The Sanhedrin, which was the sacred Synod of Israel, was the very authority which was bound to examine into, and adjudicate upon, Messianic claims. Here was no pretence of examination, no semblance of justice, but a fanatical refusal even to consider an unpalatable claim. "The proper response of an unbelieving judge, like Caiaphas, when his adjuration was answered by confession, was, 'What sign shewest Thou, then, that we may see and believe Thee?' And when, instead, he rent his clothes, with the words, 'What need we further witnesses?' it was either the preconcerted plan by which to terminate the whole semblance of judicial procedure, or, perhaps, a sudden inspiration of evil . . . in a moment when the cold, hard, cruel thoughts, which had so long smouldered in the unjust Judge, blazed up at the touch of confronting righteousness into final and murderous paroxysm." I do not ask you to pursue the history of the Passion beyond this point. We trace the hand of Caiaphas in the choice of the people, when Pilate offered them the fateful option—Barabbas or Jesus, which is called Christ. We recognise the astute political intelligence of Caiaphas in the suggestion which brought the reluctant Pilate to immediate submission: "If thou let this man go,



thou art not Cæsar's friend. Every one that maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." We hear the voice of Caiaphas leading the mockery of the Crucified. The descent of the cool politician to the inflammatory demagogue is equally apparent and intelligible. There is the promise and pledge of all extremes of sacrilegious wickedness in that original argument at the council-board: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people."

And now, bear with me while in the conclusion of my speech this afternoon I try to bring this melancholy record of cynicism and illegality into relation with our own lives. What, after all, you may say, is Caiaphas to me? Why hold me for a whole half-hour by the clock with the story of a great crime, which has been often enough re-enacted since on the old earth, and will be so long as men's consciences are at cross purposes with their interests? Well, I shall reply, it is just because the story is so truly representative that I press it on your attention. Every self-respecting man has to face the kind of difficulty which confronted Caiaphas. It is the core of every problem in casuistry. Where falls the limit to the plea of expediency? Where must the clear-cut, inexorable requirement of Right as Right claim us? What must be the term of complaisance,



of self-suppression, of deferring to the wishes of others, of consulting one's own interests? Of all people, we English folk have, perhaps, a special concern with such questions, for we are naturally prone to methods of compromise, and we are politicians from our cradles. We cannot indulge ourselves with the agreeable delusion that the warnings of the history of a Caiaphas, or of a Pilate, are only relevant to the case of the governing few—statesmen and prelates—whom we may criticise and, perhaps, denounce. We English folk are ourselves among the nations a governing class, and the besetting temptations of privilege and power are surely ours; and with reference to vast multitudes of our fellow-men, we English Citizens hold truly a supreme judicial position. We are the guardians of their rights as men, of their liberties as members of an Empire built on freedom, of their interests as dependents and subjects. It is mere matter of fact that imperial questions have within the last few years taken a prominence in our ordinary politics which is unprecedented, and which must react powerfully on our whole political life. Expediency is the normal plea of politicians; with every enlargement of the area of political responsibility political action becomes more impersonal, and the line of moral obligation more difficult to trace. We



English folk, moreover, are partisans to the backbone ; and, for most of us, almost without our being aware of it, the course of our party's immediate interest seems manifestly right. All this points to one conclusion, that we, beyond the rest of men, are exposed to the sin which lies exposed to universal censure in the career of Caiaphas. It is never really expedient to do wrong ; it is only the blindness of prejudice to imagine the contrary. Immediate difficulties may be surmounted by conceding to expediency what we must refuse to conscience, but they return upon us in new and more malignant forms. Caiaphas sold his soul for nought : his precious expediency did not avert the catastrophe he dreaded. It is never really expedient for one man to die for the people, for it is never right ; and, in the long run, whatever is right is found also to be truly expedient. Expediency is a legitimate plea within that large sphere of action where there is no other consideration accessible for human guidance, but it merges into moral obligation the moment that the requirement of Right is apparent.

I have spoken, first, of politics, because at this juncture political questions are more than commonly prominent, and there is not an honest and patriotic Englishman anywhere who is not troubled and



exercised in mind as to his political duty. On Palm Sunday, in the House of God, we cannot avoid this clear and necessary message. Keep ever before your mind, as you consider the political issues on which as free citizens you must decide, the thought of your duty to God. Make it the postulate of your political thinking that your conscience must be satisfied before your interests are consulted ; have enough faith in the God of Righteousness to believe that it can never be really worth while to do wrong ; and never allow yourself to set in contrast the expedient and the right, for they can never really be divorced.

Remember, as you read the painful record of that trial of Jesus Christ, that the passions which there uttered themselves in the worst crime of human history are present in yourself. The deluding power of imperilled interest, the resentment of wounded pride, the cynical indifference of statecraft, the fierce frenzy of social hatred, the recklessness of calumny, the cruelty of prejudice,—is there one single ingredient of the mixed Chalice of that crowning wickedness which we do not recognise as present within our own hearts, and potentially dominant in our own lives. We shall study the Passion of the World's Redeemer to little effect if we fail to find in it the rebuke and chastisement of our own faults. There is something



more than the license of poetry or the extravagance of devotion which has always made Christians speak of themselves as the very actors in the Crucifixion of their Lord.

It was my pride and hardness  
That hung Him on the Tree ;  
Those cruel nails, O Saviour,  
Were driven in by me.

For, indeed, we must recognise ourselves in those who crucified the Lord of Glory ; and we must carry over to the discipline of our own lives the lessons of Passion-tide. Try to do this in the Holy Week on which we enter to-day ; try to bring yourself and your modes and ends of living under the revealing criticism of the Cross of Christ. Discover your true spiritual allegiance in presence of the Crucified, and—perhaps for the first time with any adequate perception of what you are, and what you do—take your side in the Lord's Battle. Have faith to read aright the record of Good Friday ; have penitence to bind yourself into it. You shall grasp and make your own the twofold witness of the Cross as it reveals Christ to you, and you to yourself. "In His light we shall see light."



## XX

### JUDAS ISCARIOT<sup>1</sup>

AND JUDAS, WHICH BETRAYED HIM, ANSWERED AND SAID, IS IT I, RABBI?—*St. Matthew xxvi. 25.*

THE history of Christ's Passion is haunted by the sombre and enigmatic figure of the traitor apostle. He is in sharp contrast with the loving lavishness of Mary, and the sublime magnanimity of the Master, and the quick repentance of Peter. No element of sordid meanness is absent from his treason: he is coarse, brazen, cruel; and his belated remorse expresses itself in the desperate crime of suicide. Judas has figured in the cavils of hostile critics of the Gospel, both ancient and modern; and even now, orthodox apologists cannot agree as to their line of defence; finally, the modern student of the evangelic narratives is embarrassed by the discrepancies which throw doubt on the story of his fate. "The fact of the treason of Judas," says a modern German critic,

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Palm Sunday, April 5, 1903, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



"is so unexpected, so incredible, so terrible: it jeopardises our faith so painfully, not only in human fidelity, but also in the dignity and greatness of Jesus, in his knowledge, his judgment, his keenness of vision, and above all, the weight of his influence, and of that love of his which could melt even ice, and it is such a mark for the scoffing of enemies, beginning with the venomous Celsus, that we should have to greet it as the removal of a hundred pound weight from the heart of Christendom, if the treason of Judas could be proved to have had no existence."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly it is suggested that "the growth of the story of Judas" can be "adequately explained" on some other hypothesis than that of its truth. I confess that for myself I do not feel the difficulty, nor appreciate the proposed alternatives to the accepted version of the facts. No part of the Gospel seems to me to carry truth so patently on its face as the narrative of the Passion; and no figure in the tragedy is so finely drawn as this of Judas. To me it seems impossible to doubt that the record of the Evangelists brings us as near the actual facts as human testimony can. The more closely the narrative is studied, the more convinced we are of its truth. Could any literary skill invest it with

<sup>1</sup> Keim, quoted by Dr. Cheyne in *Ency. Bibl.* ii. 2628.



those touches, so luminous and so life-like, which arrest and move us so strangely? The change of address, for instance, from the familiar and reverent "Lord" to the chill and formal "Rabbi" could hardly have suggested itself to the Evangelist; he must have found it in his facts. "They were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto Him every one, Is it I, Lord? . . . And Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Is it I, Rabbi?" In the very scene of betrayal the episode of the kiss is almost inexplicable apart from the fact. "The demonstrative kiss (*κατεφίλησεν* = he kissed Him much) has no parallel in history, and could hardly have been invented; all the less so, because the narrative tells us that by going forward to meet His captors, and declaring Himself to be the person whom they were seeking, Jesus rendered the signal unnecessary."<sup>1</sup>

And even in the most doubtful part of the record, that which narrates the death of Judas, who can avoid the impression of that scene in the Temple, when the desperate and remorseful traitor faced his priestly accomplices on the morrow of the consummated crime? "He cast down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed: and he went away

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Plummer in Hastings' *Dictionary*, ii. 797.



and hanged himself." The Greek words are remarkable, and could hardly have suggested themselves to a mere literary compiler; they must have been dictated by the facts: "He hurled the silver pieces into the Holy Place and went into solitude." "Into the *ναός* (or sanctuary) the priests alone might go. It included both the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. It is never used like *ἱερόν* for the whole temple. Either this is a strange exception, or Judas in his desperation rushed into the sanctuary, or (most probably) he hurled the money from a distance. . . . Again, *ἀνέχωρησεν* means more than 'departed': it is commonly used of those who shun company, retire from observation."<sup>1</sup>

What a fearful picture of desperate disillusion! Crime, like necessity, makes strange bed-fellows: the peasant's ingrained, hereditary respect for the hierarchy, his awful, superstitious regard for the Holy Place, have vanished for ever; the discovery of his own immense guilt is as a sudden light on those solemn pontiffs who tempted and bought him. It is the most dreadful scene in all the records of human crime: the remorseful peasant turning back in an agony of prayer to his seducers, and being met with jeers, and making answer in that wild

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Plummer, *l.c.*



action—hurling the accursed bribe into the hallowed recesses of the Temple, and rushing away into a solitude which he would only leave in the crowning madness of suicide. “Such is the purchase of treason,” moralises Jeremy Taylor, “and the reward of covetousness; it is cheap in its offers, momentary in its possession, unsatisfying in the fruition, uncertain in the stay, sudden in its departure, horrid in the remembrance, and a ruin, a certain and miserable ruin, is in the event.”<sup>1</sup>

The naturalness of the narrative is what I ask you to notice—the sudden and irresistible revulsion of feeling in the traitor’s mind. I am sure that we need not hesitate to accept the record of the Gospel as a picture drawn from life of spiritual ruin, self-wrought, complete, and irretrievable. “And Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Is it I, Rabbi?” The question has been raised and discussed with much ardour, whether or not Judas actually received the Sacrament. In the well-known exhortation which the Rubric requires to be read, “when the Minister gives warning for the celebration of the Holy Communion,” and which is still very generally read before the great festivals, the sacrilegious communion of Judas is adduced in warning, “lest,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, iii. 336.



after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul." The obvious allusion is to the statement in St. John's Gospel that, "after the sop, then entered Satan into him"; but it is agreed that "the sop" was not the bread of the Eucharist, whatever else it may have been. St. Luke, however, definitely places Christ's announcement of His approaching betrayal after the institution of the Sacrament: "Behold, He said, the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me at the Table."

The text of St. Luke is uncertain, and according to the view adopted by the student will be its decision as to the point before us. Bishop Westcott adopted the opinion expressed in the revisers' margin, and held accordingly that Judas is not stated to have received the Sacramental Cup. "In any case," he says, "St. Luke distinctly places the prophecy of the betrayal after the distribution of the Sacramental Bread; and, like St. Paul, he places this distribution during the Supper, and the distribution of the Sacramental Cup after Supper. The other Synoptic narratives are perfectly consistent with this view; Judas then, if we adopt this interpretation of the narrative, was present at the distribution of the



Sacramental Bread, and not present at the distribution of the Sacramental Cup.”<sup>1</sup> We may add, on the authority of Dr. Plummer, that “the majority of patristic and medieval commentators, with some Reformation writers, adopt the view taken in the Anglican Liturgy, that Judas partook of the Eucharist. The majority of modern commentators hold that he did not.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the apparently decisive language of the Synoptics would have decided the question, if, at the Reformation, the communion or non-communion of Judas had not been brought into the controversy about ecclesiastical discipline. In the 28th of his famous Theses, Erastus adduces Christ’s treatment of Judas as an argument for the total disuse of excommunication, which he advocated. “Though, indeed,” he says, “there are some who attempt to prove that Judas was not present at the celebration of the New Supper (which it will be very difficult, not to say impossible, to make out satisfactorily from the Scriptures), but that he had gone out before this was instituted by our Lord: this, at least, none will dare to deny, that he had been admitted, according to the law, to eat the Passover. Which being admitted,

<sup>1</sup> Westcott, *On St. John*, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> Hastings’ *Dict.* p. 797.



our argument remains unshaken. . . . We do not read that our Lord ordered Judas to go out, so as not to be present at the New Supper ; so that, if he really went out, he did so, not because he was so required, but of his own accord. But the question we are concerned about is, What Christ did ? not what Judas did ? It is enough for our argument that the Lord did not command Judas to abstain from the Supper then instituted."

The controversy, in which Erastus was a protagonist, has subsided not in the formal triumph of any of the combatants, but in the silent but steady diminution of public interest. Whatever our theories, we are, in the matter of practice, all Erastians now ; the Altars of all Churches lie, and must lie, open to the approach of all who will to come, and who satisfy the external conditions of Communion. The attempt, whether by the Confessional, or by the action of lay-elders investigating the faith and morals of individual believers, or by such general confession as is ordained in Protestant Churches, or by private admonition of the Christian minister, to make sure of the moral fitness of the communicants, has failed, and must fail. Even where the machinery of moral discipline exists, it breaks down in the working, because men are inherently incompetent for the task



imposed on them. Against gross and manifest ill-conduct precautions can, and indeed must, be taken; but against moral disqualifications, which, however gross, are not manifest, no Church has the power, and, therefore, none has the right, to take coercive action. "It is certain," observes Jeremy Taylor, "that Judas went out as soon as he was discovered, and left this part of discipline upon record, That when a crime is made public and notorious, the governors of the church, according to their power, are to deny to give the blessed sacrament, till by repentance such persons be restored." Even "public" and "notorious" offences against morality may now, under the novel conditions of the modern Church, avoid the treatment of authority. The "notorious evil liver" of one parish escapes excommunication by presenting himself for communion in another; and those who are in malice and enmity elude the rebuke of the Church, and, perhaps, silence the protest of their own conscience, by the easy device of communicating apart from the neighbours whom they either injure or will not forgive. Of such persons, Judas Iscariot sitting at the Last Supper, with his blood-money in his pocket, and asking the brazen question, "Is it I, Rabbi?" is the true representative.



You will not resent my speaking a few concluding words on the subject which must be in your thoughts on Palm Sunday. I mean, the subject of your own treatment of the Holy Sacrament. Judas Iscariot serves to bring before us the question of anxious interest, What is that unworthy receiving of Holy Communion, against which the Prayer-Book warns us in language of such appalling severity? Judas Iscariot also provides the answer. Four facts about the traitor stand out from the record.

1. He was "in" sin, that is, tied and bound by the habit of sin; his crowning treason was the climax of a long process of moral failure; he confesses involuntarily the settled direction of his thoughts when in view of Mary's gift of love he asks brutally, "To what purpose is this waste?"

2. He held the gains of sin. The sacred record seems to make it plain that the priests had paid in advance. "They weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver." With true sacerdotal astuteness they knew that there is no security so strong as that of "money down." That covetous peasant had thirty cogent reasons under his girdle for going through with his treason: the way of repentance was closed by the gains of iniquity.

3. He had hardened himself against warnings.



The reiterated emphasis with which the Master had rebuked "covetousness," and His solemn assertion that discovery would surely come in due course on all things hidden, could only have borne one meaning to the Traitor. Christ saw through him, read his secret thoughts, perceived his hypocrisy, and prophesied his exposure. That brazen question, "Is it I, Rabbi?" was the climax of a long course of resentment against Christ's warnings, a final breach with the thought of repentance, a banishing for ever of the purpose of restoration.

4. With the habit of sin rooted in the past, binding his soul, with the gains of sin clutched in his hands as he faced the Master, Judas was going into the future with the conscious and definite project of further sin. When Christ gave him the revealing token, at once a last appeal to his better self and a judgment on his present course, he had his last chance, and he knew it. "After the sop, then Satan entered into him. He then, having received the sop, went out straightway, and it was night."

So farewell hope, and with hope, farewell fear ;  
Farewell remorse : all good to me is lost ;  
Evil, be thou my good :—

"Despair is very often used like the bolts and



bars of hell gates: it seizes upon them that had entered into the suburbs of eternal death by an habitual sin, and it secures them against all retreat." Repentance came to him, but with no power of recovery in it. His was not that "godly sorrow" which "bringeth no regret," but that "sorrow of the world" which "worketh death." He "perished by the most infamous hands in the world, that is, by his own."

Here then, in an extreme case if you will, and yet one that is truly representative, we have the portrait of the "unworthy" communicant. To be in some habit of known sin, to hold fast to the profits of unrighteousness, to have the purpose of further sin in our minds,—these are disqualifications for Holy Communion which cannot be dispensed by any authority whatsoever. Ignorance need be no barrier, nor stupidity, nor the distraction of manifold anxieties, nor weakness of faith, so only it be true faith which we have; nor coldness of devotion, so only we have love in our hearts; nor sins committed in the past, so only we "take sanctuary in the arms of the Lord" against them; nor temptations besetting us even as we kneel to pray,—none of these need make us "unworthy" of that holy Sacrament, for all these may be compatible with a genuine discipleship, and out of them all the Grace of God can bring us; but sin indulged,



sin used for gain, sin purposed, these change the holy Sacrament into guilt, and fear, and threatening of ruin. A penitent murderer may draw near the Altar : a dishonest shopkeeper may not ; an adulterer, who has broken, at whatever cost, the chain of his criminal attachment, may come : an unforgiving child may not. " But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. . . . If we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged."

None other but yourselves can do this work ; we who are Christ's Ministers can, at most, advise and pray ; but the solemn inquisition into conduct, the stern purgation of conscience, the momentous final decision, are incommunicably yours.



## XXI

### CHRIST CRUCIFIED<sup>1</sup>

WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED, UNTO JEWS A STUMBLING-BLOCK, AND UNTO GENTILES FOOLISHNESS; BUT UNTO THEM THAT ARE CALLED, BOTH JEWS AND GREEKS, CHRIST THE POWER OF GOD, AND THE WISDOM OF GOD.—1 *Corinthians* i. 23, 24.

PERHAPS, of all the commemorations of the Christian Year, Good Friday is that which least lends itself to preaching, and yet strangely compels it. To speak about the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and not to wound the sensitive heart of Christian devotion by the impertinence of conventional rhetoric, is a difficult task; to speak at all on a theme so awful and so moving, and not to offend the Christian conscience in some particular, is perhaps beyond our reach. And yet the Cross of Christ is still what it was when St. Paul addressed himself to the Greeks of Corinth, that element in the Christian Message which is richest in saving power. There has, indeed,

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Good Friday, April 1, 1904, in St. Margaret's, Westminster.



passed over the opinions of civilised men a strange and significant change since the Apostle had to defend his preaching against critics both Jewish and Gentile. No one now, with the long commentary of Christian experience to guide his judgment, would describe the "Word of the Cross," the Gospel of the Crucifixion, as "a stumbling-block," or "foolishness"; for all the world knows now that the assertion of St. Paul has been wonderfully confirmed through all the ages since, and is being confirmed among men still: "Unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Perhaps the extraordinary power of St. Paul arises from the fact that he fastened on the Crucifixion and proclaimed it as a religious fact of supreme importance. We may criticise his theory of the Atonement, and trace its sources in the Rabbinic Schools, where he had received his training, but we cannot mistake the true strength of his teaching. The Word of the Cross was that version of Christianity which had gone home to the personal experience of the Apostle; it brought Christ into direct relation with his conscience, and with his heart. He was "crucified with Christ" by the power of a faith which worked by love, a faith which was an enthusiasm of gratitude and a passion of devotion. There is



perceptible in the words that doctrinal colouring which belonged to his age and nation, but will any Christian man to-day deny that they remain freshly and unalterably true? "The love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died ; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him, Who for their sakes died and rose again."

Explain it how you will, or perhaps best leave it unexplained, the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, that is, the whole series of events which are gathered up in the Passion, has drawn in its train this astonishing result, that ever since men have been moved by it to efforts of service and sacrifice. There is no parallel to this anywhere else. Beneficent influence has, of course, always attached to human lives which are plainly superior to the common standard ; and there have been lives of such transcendent excellence that succeeding generations have reached a general consensus with respect to them, and placed them in a calendar as the Saints of Mankind. But in all this there is no true parallel to the moral influence of the Crucified Jesus. In a vague way we profess an admiration for Socrates, or Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius, or those great Oriental Saints and Religion-



Founders whose names have become more familiar of late, but we are not moved by them to self-questioning or efforts at imitation ; but " Jesus Christ and Him Crucified " has this effect upon us, and even when we would disclaim a formal discipleship we cannot wholly avoid this singular moral impression. If it be said that of all the Saints of Humanity Jesus Christ alone has been worshipped as the Incarnate Creator, and that this extraordinary concentration of interest on His Person, rather than on His Teaching, accounts for the unequalled effect of His example, then we may accept the explanation and point out that it raises another question which we, as Christians, can but answer in the confession of the Church's Creed. Other religions make successful appeal to men's reason and conscience, but where is there outside Christianity any parallel to the blended worship and affection which Christians feel for Christ? The personal character of the Founder of Buddhism was, we can hardly help believing, strangely beautiful, but what do we really know of a life the earliest records of which are many generations subsequent to the facts? The remarkable hold which the Buddhist religion has upon the allegiance of Asiatics appears to be in hardly any appreciable degree affected by the character of the Founder. The



philosophy, the system of ascetic living, the sweet and catholic morality of Buddhism, stand, so to say, on their own bases, and need no other. We might say much the same of the Religion of Islam. The personality of the Arabian Prophet contributes no strength to it, and stands in no vital relation to it. Whatsoever truth he taught stands independently of him, and his character has no more than a sentimental interest for his disciples. In our Religion how different everything is! Here all the whole truth of doctrine and of morality are gathered up in the Person of the Founder. Other spiritual teachers point men always beyond themselves; Jesus Christ always fastens their attention on Himself. The Gospel of Christianity is necessarily uttered in a Biography, and of that Biography the essential witness is found in the closing chapter. Nothing turns for the Buddhist on the character of Gautama, for the Mohammedan on the character of Mohammed; everything turns for the Christian on the character of Christ. One step aside from the path of holiness on His part, one word of angry resentment, of self-regard, of lost self-control from His lips, one trace of moral failure in His life, and we are undone. "They have taken away our Lord, and we know not where to find Him." Jesus Christ's sinlessness, it



has been truly said by that excellent divine, the late Professor Bruce of Glasgow, is "the one miracle vitally important to faith." Now it is impossible to attribute sinlessness to any person of whom we have but a slight knowledge, and indeed I suppose no evidence could, as a mere matter of logical demonstration, justify the attribution: if Christians proclaim the sinlessness of Christ they assuredly have other grounds for doing so than those of historical testimony; but no grounds could suffice to sustain their faith if historical testimony were adverse. Here, then, we can see the critical importance of the fact that the verdict of history on the life of Christ imposes no veto on the conviction of the Church that He, and He alone, was "without sin."

On Good Friday such reflections as these are surely not unfitting. We pass in review the history of our Saviour's crucifixion. We see Him subjected to extreme pressures of affliction—betrayed by one apostle, denied repeatedly by another, deserted by all, oppressed by every possible illegality, insulted, brutally tortured, put to death in agony long drawn out, and amid every circumstance of public infamy. We have the inestimable privilege of knowing how all this process of wrong impressed those who



witnessed it ; we have the still higher privilege of knowing how it impressed our Lord Himself. The New Testament contains the records of eyewitnesses, and the Words from the Cross. "The Seven Words," says one, "are Seven Windows by which we can still look into His very mind and heart, and learn the impressions made on Him by what was happening." But we must not limit this self-revealing character to the Seven Words, beautifully and spiritually luminous as they are. Take the whole story of the Passion and mark the utterances of Christ in private to His followers, in public to His persecutors, and consider the witness they bear to the Speaker's character. There is in them the note of a sorrow almost beyond endurance, of an immense disappointment, of an intolerable desertion, but there is no trace of selfishness, or of anger, or of fear. "Never man so spake."

There is profound reasonableness in the special regard we pay to the words of the dying. We feel instinctively that, in the last hours of life, the deep, inevitable disguises, which cover men's genuine selves even from their most intimate friends, will fall away, and leave them free to speak their very own thoughts at last. The world with its bribes and its menaces has no hold over them now ; Death



the Emancipator breaks all yokes, and at the gates of the grave the seal is broken from all lips, and the most cautious and the most timid may speak plain. Old loyalties of youth are confessed by the lips of the dying, and on the hearth of life's failing fires old hatreds long smothered flare up in baleful flame. Within the shadow of death there reigns the utter truthfulness of complete equality. "The small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master." The Christian Church has the sanction of deep human instincts and treads the beaten track of general human experience to-day when, standing by the Cross of Calvary, she reads the Master's Mind in His dying Words. There is no parallel in history to the life of the Son of Man; there is no parallel in history to His death. The last days of the Founder of Buddhism are comparatively well recorded; and none can deny that there is pathos and dignity in the departure of the aged Sage amidst his disciples. The last utterance of the Buddha is suggestively impersonal. "Then the Blessed One said to the monks, 'Behold now, mendicants, I say unto you, everything is subject to decay, press forward untiringly to perfection.'" Contrast the last Word from the Cross, "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit." How



intensely personal, and therefore how profoundly illuminating, is that cry of affectionate confidence when

the soul that seem'd  
Forsaken, feels her present God again,  
And in her Father's arms  
Contented dies away.

Few death-scenes have printed themselves more deeply on the memory of mankind than that of Socrates, and, in truth, it was a noble ending to a noble life; but can it be fairly said to contribute to the moral education of the race anything truly original? and does not the final direction to Kriton, to see that a promised sacrifice to Æsculapius was duly provided, drag the whole episode down to the frankly normal plane? Who could seriously suggest there any parallel to the scene on Calvary? Some, indeed, have claimed to find in the teaching of Seneca a parallel to our Saviour's dying prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"; but it needs but to read the great Stoic's words to see that their spirit and scope are wholly different: "There is no reason why thou shouldest be angry: pardon them; they are all mad." Contrast, not parallel, is suggested by these utterances. The one breathes nothing but tenderness, compassion, and



charity ; the other expresses nothing but a withering scorn. Christian history alone contains the record of departures which are truly in spirit and effect akin to the Death of Jesus ; but these, without exception, have drawn from Calvary their element of distinctive beauty. The Good Friday hymn rightly dwells on the exemplary character of that Death on the Cross—

It is finish'd ! Blessed Jesus,  
Thou hast breathed Thy latest sigh, .  
Teaching us, the sons of Adam,  
How the Son of God can die.

“Christ hath perfumed the Cross and the grave, and made all sweet,” says Leighton, and when all is said, there is no better authentication of the truth of any Religion than its power to sweeten death ; for, indeed, the sweetening of death implies the ennobling of life, the making men able to live so that the King of Terrors, when he comes, has lost his power. The Word of the Cross brings peace at the last, because it brings power at the first. “We preach Christ crucified . . . Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” Yes, indeed, if we would watch by the Cross of Christ to any purpose to-day we must be able to adopt for our own the



whole declaration of the Apostle. We must see in the Crucifixion something more than the pathos of a great Failure, something more than the gloom of a great Crime. There is profound and perpetual truth in St. Paul's summary of his Gospel as on one side the preaching of Christ crucified, and on another the preaching of Christ as the power and wisdom of God. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself"—that is the core of Christianity, and the secret of the unfailing persuasiveness of the Gospel. That gracious life of Jesus had been a gradual manifestation of the Truth about God; but we did not grasp the whole Message until the gracious life passed, through deepening passion, to the sublime death. Then, when, through and above all the accumulating sorrows and wrongs which crushed the Son of Man to the earth, there was audible and apparent only Love—love forgiving, love enduring, love entreating, love prevailing—then we could understand that Love is in truth Divine. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Nor may we stop there; the logic of the conscience requires a practical conclusion from these premisses of Love Divine: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." So the



Cross of Jesus stands among us as the very Symbol of active charity, the very Standard of every crusade against the woes and wrongs of men, the very Sign of Reconciliation. As we recall the events of that first Good Friday, and remember Who He was Who died on Calvary, and what a river of beneficence has flowed from His Sorrow, we cannot help being drawn within the circle of His influence, and moved strangely to self-questioning and to self-rebuke. We know, what those watchers by the Cross could but vaguely suspect, that Jesus was dying for our sakes ; and we understand, what they could but dimly feel, that only by living as He lived can we enter into His redemptive Passion. So we to-day, by penitence and reformation, by acts of charity and thoughts of humility, can share and serve the Mission of Jesus, crucified for us.

Each proof renewed of Thy great love  
Humbles me more and more,  
And brings to light forgotten sins,  
And lays them at my door.  
The more I love Thee, Lord ! the more  
I hate my own cold heart ;  
The more Thou woundest me with love,  
The more I feel the smart.



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